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COPOLI'S THE QUAKER CITY DETECTIVE

May 17
1887
OR,
A Hound on the Wolves' Track,

BY CHARLES MORRIS.

CHAPTER I.

TOO LATE FOR SERVICE.

A SHARP clang rung loudly through the still morning air. An iron door had closed with a clash that sent its echoes far and wide. Passers-by turned and gazed curiously at the castle-like stone building, that looked like the stronghold of some ancient baron. It was, in fact, the stout stone structure known as Cherry Hill, the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, facing on Fairmount avenue in the good city of Philadelphia.

The iron gates had just closed. It was not, however, to lock in a prisoner from the world. On the contrary a man stood outside the gates, which had shut behind him, leaving him in the

"KNOW ME, HEY? HOW DE DO? ALLERS GLAD TO SEE OLD CRONIES."

Cop Colt, the Quaker City Detective.

free outer world. It was a convict who had served his term and was discharged.

The eyes that were fixed upon him were not more curious than his own, as he stood there, in a half stupefied attitude, gazing around him. There was an unhealthy whiteness in his skin, as of one on whom the sun had not shone for years. His eyes blinked in the unaccustomed glare of light. His hands were nervously clutched.

Discharged convict as he was his handsome face was not that of a villain. There was nothing of the slouch in his erect attitude and well-proportioned form. His dress was of good material, though antiquated in cut. It was the clothing taken from him on entering the prison five years before, and which was now returned to him.

"Five years!" he muttered, between his clinched teeth. "Buried for five years! Now come to life again in the living world! Is it my turn now? I know not—I know not," he helplessly continued. "I have thought it over for weeks, months, years. But I cannot penetrate the mystery. There was a plot; a deep, demonish plot. I have been the innocent victim of a villain. Can I bring him to justice? Ah! if I could but lay my hand on any one, and say: Thou art the man!"

He turned and walked slowly away, his head depressed. There was nothing here of the firm, joyful aspect of the newly-freed captive. Liberty without retribution! It was nothing to him. His mind ran deep with schemes of revenge. To be imprisoned five years for another's crime! It was a terrible story.

He walked slowly onward. The hard brick pavement hurt his feet. He gazed furtively around him, like a fox that has escaped the hounds and is stealing to cover. Those who had stopped a moment to gaze at him walked on.

"Poor devil! He has been well bleached in his prison cell," muttered one.

"Looks like a genuine cut-throat," grumbled another. "I suppose we'll soon hear of some more burglaries. They ought to keep that sort in the stone cage for life."

The released man moved on, with a vague thought of reaching a place where he would not be recognized at sight as a jail-bird.

He disappeared from the street, and all fell back into its accustomed aspect. It was but a momentary episode in the life of the city.

Ten minutes passed away. Then over the stone surface of the street there came the sharp rattle of carriage-wheels, and clatter of hoofs. Some one was driving up at a rattling pace.

The carriage was drawn up with a sharp jerk at the gate of the prison. It was a one-seated, open wagon, containing two men.

One of these, a bearded, stern-faced person, flung the reins to his companion, and sprung hastily to the ground. He looked at his watch.

"Just eleven," he said. "In time, I judge. Wait for me. I will settle this business in a jiffy."

He gave the gate bell a sharp pull. The wicket opened quickly in response. A sharp-faced keeper looked out.

"Is it you, Mr. Thomas?" he queried, with a respectful bow. "Step in, sir."

"How do, Jones?" with a brisk nod. "How go the lambs this morning, eh?"

He stepped through the opening.

"Docile and innocent, sir," laughed the gate-keeper. "You came up with a whirl, Mr. Thomas. Important business?"

"Yes." Mr. Thomas seated himself, and fanned his face with his hat. "You have on your list—Let me see." He consulted a paper. "One Dorsey Hamilton?"

"Just so," answered the keeper. "Number 110. One of our best boarders. Sorry to lose him. In for six years. One year remitted on account of special industry and good-behavior. Time up to-day."

"I know it," answered Mr. Thomas, shortly, unfolding the paper he held. "Well, Jones, as long as he is so docile a bird, you can keep him in your cage a trifle longer. Here is an order from Judge Norwood. For special reasons of the Court, the remission of sentence is not to be allowed. He must be held till the end of his term."

Jones looked at the speaker with wide-open eyes. He reached unconsciously for the paper, but his fingers failed to clasp it. It fell with a rustling sound to the floor.

"What ails you?" cried Thomas, harshly. "Are you going into a fit, man?"

Jones shook himself, while a queer look came upon his hard face.

"You are too late," he remarked.

"Too late!"

"Yes. The man is already discharged. He walked out that gate fifteen minutes ago."

"Thunder!" A still harsher oath came from the lips of the court messenger. "You've played the deuce among you! Eleven o'clock was the hour for his discharge. It was just eleven when I entered. What do you mean by anticipating the hour?"

"Lord, sir, we didn't expect a paper like that. Mr. Spenser was going his rounds. When he came to No. 110 he sent him out. Who'd have thought ten minutes would matter?"

"You've played hob, by Jupiter! The judge

will be raving. We must snap him again. Which way did he turn?"

"You can't do it. His discharge was made out in due form. The law does not permit a re-arrest."

"A fig for that!" Mr. Thomas snapped his fingers. "It was a mistake. The record must be erased. He was dismissed before his time, and can be snatched again."

"The time is past now."

"He can't swear to that. I don't fancy he sports a watch. Which way did he turn?"

"Down, toward Twentieth street."

"Then here's for him. And you folk may look out for a scoring from the judge. He's a terror when he gets his back up."

The speaker sprung lightly through the wicket, and leaped hastily into the waiting carriage.

"The bird has flown," he announced, briefly, as he grasped the reins. "Fifteen minutes start on me. We must take him again if it's in the wood. Have you handcuffs, Joe?"

"Yes."

"He may show fight. There'll be Old Nick to pay if he slips off."

As he spoke he had turned the carriage so shortly as to throw one wheel high into the air. A touch from the whip and the horse darted away.

Down the street they rattled, the light vehicle bounding over the rough cobble-stones. A minute brought them to the corner of Twentieth street where they drew up, and addressed some loungers on the pavement.

"Did you notice a white-faced chap pass this way? A discharged prisoner?"

"Yes," was the answer. "A customer with a skin like new milk. He turned down Twentieth ten minutes ago. Something wrong? Are you after him?"

The pursuer did not condescend to answer. In a whiff the team shot round the corner. The whip was now applied in earnest. The horse darted onward at a wild pace, wheeling round passing cars and wagons with a jerk that threatened to tear the wheels from the hubs.

If the man was still on that street, he would certainly be overtaken.

Square after square was passed. No trace of the fugitive appeared; among the people visible in advance there were none of his figure. The stern driver knew his quarry well by sight.

"Hang him! he has turned off; he is not on this street," he exclaimed.

"We must ask those chaps on the corner," suggested his companion.

A group of men on the corner of Callowhill street were questioned.

Yes, one of them had seen such a man; noticed his pale face and the old style of his clothes; a well-built fellow; not bad-looking. Turned down Callowhill street about five minutes ago—couldn't be far ahead.

Away went the pursuers. They asked their way now at the corner of every square. The fugitive was so marked in appearance that nearly every one had noticed him.

Three minutes—two minutes ahead. The chase was getting warn.

"What do you want with him?"

It was a stout, tramp-like individual with a dissipated face they had last questioned.

"None of your business. Can't you answer a straight question without asking another?"

"Not to you, Jerry Thomas. I know you. You're the bull-dog of the Quarter Sessions. What poor devil are you barkin' after now?"

"An escaped prisoner. Speak out, or it may be worse for you."

"That cat won't jump," laughed the tramp. "I know a bit 'bout the law. Do your own dirty work yourself."

"We are wasting time," suggested Mr. Thomas's companion; "try Carleton street."

The carriage rolled on. The tramp winked after his discomfited questioner, and walked on in the same direction.

A narrow street, flanked by small, dilapidated, uninviting houses; dirty children swarming on the pavements, frowsy women in the door-ways. The pursuers turned into it.

"There's our man!" exclaimed Joe, pointing to a person who was walking slowly on, about half-way down the square.

"That's him, for a pretzel. We have him now."

"I am not so sure of that," muttered Joe, looking at the disreputable locality.

Within a half-minute more the carriage halted suddenly opposite the pedestrian, who turned to observe it.

It was the face and form of the released Cherry Hill prisoner.

"Hold fast there, my friend," cried Thomas, springing to the pavement. "You are Dorsey Hamilton?"

"That is my name," came the firm but surprised answer.

"I want you then. You are to go back to Cherry Hill. There was a mistake in your discharge. You must return and have it rectified."

"Go back?" faltered the man.

"Just so. And no fooling about it. Come. Step into the carriage. I am sent after you."

The women in the neighboring doorways were listening with deep interest to this conversation. The tramp who had been just accosted by the officer was coming along the street toward them.

"But I was discharged in due form," hesitated the man, while his pale face grew even paler.

"I have a copy of the discharge in my pocket."

"Oh! that's of no use. It was a mistake, I tell you. I have an order of the court to detain you. Come, my good fellow."

"Where's your order?" asked Dorsey.

"Where?" He felt for it. "Oh! I left it with Jones, at the prison lodge. You shall see it after we get there. Come, there is enough of this folly. I have no time to waste."

"You are a liar and a fraud," cried Dorsey sternly. "I am a free man, and will not be kidnapped by you. I stand here on the rights of a free American, under the laws of my country. Lay hands on me at your peril!"

A burst of approving cries came from the listeners.

"That's a dig in Jerry's side," cried the tramp, who had come up. "Stick to that, my hearty."

Jerry Thomas hesitated for an instant. He knew he was undertaking a dangerous job. But he had the order of the court?

"Go you will, then, by hook or crook," he exclaimed, after an instant's pause. "Here, Joe. Our man resists. We must take him by force of arms."

Joe sprung from the carriage. The two advanced on Dorsey, who held his place, pale, but resolute, his face full of a look of honest indignation.

"The darbies, Joe."

The officer placed his hand on Dorsey's shoulder, while his comrade produced a pair of small steel handcuffs.

Yet the next instant they were somewhat surprised. Dorsey's pale face reddened at this touch, and with a sudden and unexpected exhibition of skill and strength he flung out his right arm, taking the officer square in the chin.

The latter staggered back, and took a seat on the curb.

At the same instant the tramp ran up, with a cry of approval, and gave Joe a quick, skillful trip that dropped him heavily on his companion, who was just trying to rise.

Dorsey stood immovable, and as if a little bewildered by his success. Cries of warning came from the friendly voices of the women. The tramp caught him hastily by the arm and dragged him along.

"Come!" he shouted. "Jerry's a reg'lar bulldog. He'll have you, or kill you, if he gits up. Come, you slow-bird."

Dorsey mechanically obeyed. They were within ten feet of the open door of a house. Into this they hastily plunged, just as the officers were regaining their feet.

The woman of the house, who had witnessed their entrance with a nod of encouragement, seized a broom and began to diligently sweep out her doorway. When the furious officers came up she was busily engaged in this labor.

"Make way there!" cried Jerry harshly, striving to push past.

But it was not easy to get by that broom and its holder.

"Git out, you omadhaun! This is me own house, and I won't have no blatherin' kidnappers enterin' it."

"I'll arrest you for harboring criminals."

"Do it, af ye dare! Show yer warrant!" She raised her broom threateningly.

"By the gods this won't do!" cried Jerry, springing at the broom, which instantly came down with a ringing whack on his head.

At the same instant Joe slipped under the uplifted arm of the termagant, and darted into the house. Jerry quickly broke through Mrs. Finnigan's guard, and followed.

But it was in vain. The fugitive and his defender had disappeared. Search as they would, no trace of him could be found. He had vanished as utterly as if the earth had swallowed him up.

CHAPTER II.

PICKING UP LOOSE THREADS.

AN hour after the events recorded in the last chapter, the two men who had pursued the discharged prisoner reported to Judge Norwood the ill result of their mission.

The judge was a small man, with a full, round face, and an odd twinkle in his gray eyes. The court was in session, but at that moment a trial had just concluded, and he had some minutes to spare.

He listened to the report with a slight appearance of nervousness, partly shown by his pushing his gold-rimmed glasses uneasily up and down on his forehead.

When they finished, however, the judge had grown quite grave and collected.

"You have done well among you," he said, with a stern accent. "It seems impossible to have the public business of the city conducted properly. The prison officials had no authority to discharge their man before the prescribed hour."

"So I told Jones," broke in Jerry Thomas.

"I thought it my duty to bring the man back, but he knocked me down and escaped. Say the word, judge, and I will have him yet, before he is a day older."

"He served you right," answered the judge severely. "You went beyond your instructions, and further than the law will sustain. The man was legally discharged. If he chooses to proceed against you, my man, he has you in a scrape."

Jerry grew red at this information.

"But—I thought—"

"You had no business to think. You had but one thing to do. If the man brings suit in this court against you for attempt at false arrest, I will send the pair of you for a year to the county prison."

"Mercy, judge!"

"Come, come," said the judge, his stern face softening. "It was mistaken zeal. I don't want you men to get into trouble, for I can't spare you. You had best forget this thing. A short memory is convenient sometimes. Get my order from Jones, and return it to me. Tell him I am very angry, and that such a thing must not occur again. He had better have a short memory, too. Some pettifogger may advise the man to bring suit, but—"

"I will go at once," exclaimed Jerry hastily. "I am much obliged, judge. Come, Joe."

The judge followed them with his eyes as they left the court, while a furtive smile played around his thin lips.

"That will settle it," he muttered. "They are both well scared, and they will throw Spenser and Jones into a nervous fever. There is some use in having these men afraid of you. I have got out of the difficulty very neatly, for they think I am only concerned about them, and Hamilton's word will not go far against a general denial. But it is ugly water for a judge of the court to sail in. I hardly think I will be tempted into such a thing in future."

He resumed his seat on the bench, and called for the next case on the docket, his face as quiet and impassive as if nothing underhand or mysterious had ever come into his life.

Meanwhile Dorsey Hamilton and his new-found friend were seated in the tap-room of a small tavern, near by where the attempted arrest had taken place. On the table between them were two foaming glasses of ale.

There was a marked difference between the two men. Dorsey's pale and aristocratic features were in strong contrast with the red face and bulbous nose of his ill-dressed companion, who looked as if he had been accustomed to drink whisky by the quart. Yet there was a certain sharpness in the man's eye that seemed to tell a different story.

"Guv 'em the slip well," he declared, with a hoarse laugh. "There's nothin' like a handy back-gate, and a short corner. I've heered your story, Mr. Hamilton, and it's a queer one. I like you, and I'm goin' to stick to you, by Jerusha I am!" He brought his fist on the table with a blow that made the glasses dance. This seemed to remind him of a neglected duty, and he took a deep swig of the ale. "But there's one thing I want to tell you: You're a green 'un, and a tenderfoot. You've told me a'ready more nor you've any business to. Don't you go round blowin' your trumpet to every rooster, or you'll soon blow away all your chances."

"What do you mean, Jake?"

"That's my handle, Jake Jumper. See here, shipmate, ther's a mystery round you. You've got enemies. Deep 'uns. They ain't let up on you yet. Why was that order sent to keep you in quod?"

"I don't know," faltered Dorsey.

"There's somethin' back of 't. Tain't the general thing. Ought to know. Been there myself. Dunno what's behind it, but there's a cat's claws somewhere in that bag."

"And what shall I do?" asked Dorsey, a look of nervous desperation coming on his intelligent features.

"You want to git even with 'em? You want to salt the chap that played the traverse on you?"

"I want justice and retribution," broke out Dorsey, with deep indignation. "I want to clear my name of the foul blot which has rested on it for five years. It has been my hope by day, and my dream by night. For five long years of false imprisonment I have kept myself from despair by thirst for revenge, and by a determination to clear myself of the shame that rests upon me. Yet, what shall I do? I have thought until my brain reels. Yet I cannot solve the mystery that hangs around me. I only know that the crime was not the work of my hands."

Jake nodded knowingly, and finished his glass of ale.

"S'pose not," he said. "Told you you was a tenderfoot. Takes sharper eyes nor youn to look through a milestone. Now, jist let the old man guv you a pint or two. Fu'st place, don't you say a word to nobody 'bout this affair. Jist you shet up on't like an oyster. A still tongue makes a wise head."

"Yes, yes. And then?"

"Then you want a detective. And you've hit the mark, fur I know the precise man. Wasn't

allers what you see me, Mr. Hamilton, and I know a thing or two, if I am an old soaker. This job's bottled up close, and it's only to be opened with a corkscrew. Here's your man." He wrote a name and address on a slip of paper with a well-chewed scrap of lead pencil. "Got any money?"

"Yes. I saved up a good sum by my over-work in the prison."

"Then spruce yerself up. That rig is out o' style. Mustn't have folks noticin' you and talkin' 'bout you. Got to play the fox in the hole till ye're ready to bite. Ain't got a stray fiver to lend the old man, have ye? Wouldn't ax, but I'm cleaned out."

"Here's a ten, Jake. I owe you that much."

"Guv me a five, I say," answered Jake, a little sternly. "Don't you go to playin' liberal, and handin' over more than folks ax. You'll want all yer stray cash 'fore you git through this job. Mought have to sell your coat yet."

"That's good advice. I will remember it. You know something about things, Jake."

"Cut my eye-teeth a good forty years ago," answered Jake, reflectively. "Now git up an' git, Mr. Hamilton! I ain't the sort o' coon fur you to be seen consortin' with. You go see that detective. Tell him Jake Jumper sent ye. He knows me. And if you want the old man any time, ax the landlord here. Mebbe I mought come in o' some use."

"I won't forget," said Dorsey, shaking hands with the shrewd old fellow. "You've done me a service to-day that I will repay yet. Good-by."

"Slide's the word. And keep a stiff upper lip."

The released prisoner left the room. Jake lay back in his chair, and followed him closely with his eyes. A strange change had come over the expression of his face.

"There goes a gudgeon in a school of sharks," he muttered. "He is fooled from the start. But I fancy that I've fooled men who call themselves sharp in my time. Let me see; there's a case in this."

His language had become correct and polished; the dissipated expression had left his face. He drew a memorandum-book from his pocket, and made several entries in it with his scrap of pencil.

"There, the man has left his glass untasted. I suppose I must keep up my character by repairing his fault."

Jake swallowed the glass of ale, and then reclined back in his chair in an attitude of reflection.

But we must leave him to the mysterious subject of his reflections, and take the reader to another part of the city than that in which these events had taken place, and to a later hour of the same day.

From the three situations in which we have already been, the porter's lodge of the penitentiary, the judge's bench at the criminal court, and the tap-room of an ale-house in an unsavory portion of the city, we must now go, with the license of the novelist, to the richly-furnished parlor of an aristocratic mansion on Walnut street, in the most stylish section of the city.

Two persons were present in this apartment. One was a woman who would anywhere have been called beautiful. Of stately figure, clear complexion, and delicately cut features, her face expressed at once a winning softness and a resolute pride. She was a woman whom love might win, but who would turn with abhorrence from aught low, false, or unworthy.

She was in the prime of young womanhood, perhaps some twenty-three years of age. The rustling silks in which she was attired, the delicate lace at her throat, the rose in her jet-black hair, her attitude, as she half sat, half reclined on the crimson cushions of a rich sofa, gave her the appearance of one who had just stepped out of some picture of the famous beauties of the past.

Her companion was a gentleman of from twenty-five to thirty years of age. He was of rather small figure, yet well-proportioned, and with very shapely hands and feet. His fine form was well set off by the neatly fitting dress he wore, in which might be seen just the least taste of foppishness.

In face he was handsome, with delicate nose, small, well-cut mouth, and eyes that could be soft or stern, as occasion demanded. His face, indeed, was one that could not be read at a glance. There were lines in it, and hints of expression, that told of thoughts within which were not patent on the surface. It was a face that could be inscrutable if it would.

This gentleman stood opposite his fair companion, one hand resting lightly on a chair back, while the fingers of the other played with his full mustache.

"Men and women do not look at these things in just the same light, Miss Amberly," he was saying, in a tone of easy politeness. "Excuse me for saying that men are more accustomed to weighing evidence, while women are too apt to let themselves be swayed by sentiment. I have been loth myself to believe Hamilton guilty. Yet—" He shrugged his shoulders meaningly.

"That is an old argument, Mr. Osborn," she quietly replied, though with a faint tinge of red

in her cheek. "It is true, no doubt, to some extent. But, after all evidence is not the surest thing in the world. There have been cases where the courts have hung innocent people on strong testimony. And sentiment, as you call it—a woman's quick intuition of character, as I call it—is sometimes a safer guide than your darling evidence. I believed in that verdict five years ago. I doubt it to-day."

"I have not been without the same feeling," answered Mr. Osborn, with a smile. "It is hard to think ill of one whom you have respected, and I find myself hoping against all reason that he may have been innocent. That is the effect of time. It is hard to keep before us the strong points of evidence."

"It is the effect of your better judgment," answered she warmly. "But if he were innocent, if he has suffered that cruel punishment without deserving it, what a terrible retribution must come somewhere and some time to the real criminal!"

"A jury trial is a pretty safe thing to lean upon," he replied. "We must not let ourselves be swayed by our wishes and feelings. There can be no doubt whatever but that Hamilton was guilty of the crime."

"I fear not," she said, slowly, a strange sentiment working in her beautiful face. "I know not what brought us to talking of him to-day, Mr. Osborn. Unless it be that report that he is to receive a remission of a year's sentence, and be set free from prison to-day. What a sensation it must be, to come from that living tomb out into the sunlit world again!"

"I understand that that matter has been reconsidered. He will not be released," remarked Mr. Osborn quietly.

"Ha!" The lady rose hastily from her half-reclining attitude. "What do you mean?"

"It is the action of the judge. He has sent word to the office that the prisoner has been overheard making threats of revenge. Under those circumstances he thinks it best to detain him."

"Revenge? Revenge against whom?"

"Oh! I know not. Vague talk, probably. I could name no special person against whom he could have such a feeling. Possibly Mr. Markham. Quite likely he has a bitter feeling against him."

"And is that the character of our prison discipline?" she asked, with some indignation. "To listen at the cell-doors, and pick up the impudent words of prisoners to use against them? To think of a man being locked up in a cell for a whole year for some hasty words spoken in his supposed privacy."

"It is hard, indeed; but society must be protected. You see, Miss Amberly—" He paused, as a light rap came on the door.

"Come in."

The door was opened by a servant, who handed Mr. Osborn a note.

"It was just left at the front door for you," he said. "A messenger from the office."

"Any answer?"

"No."

He tore it open as the servant retired.

"Some matter of business, I suppose."

Yet his face changed color as he read, and a hasty exclamation came from his lips. This was but for an instant, however. The next moment he had thrown off these signs of emotion, and was his old self again.

"A strange bit of news," he remarked. "It took me aback at first. You will be glad to hear it."

"Ah?" she answered questioningly.

"Yes. Hamilton has been discharged. The judge, it seems, reconsidered his intention, and allowed the remission of sentence to be made. The man is free."

"I am certainly very glad to hear it," she exclaimed, "for in spite of all I believe he is an innocent man."

Osborn bit his lips as he thrust the note into his pocket.

"There is no convincing an obstinate woman," he said to himself.

CHAPTER III.

COP COLT TAKES A CASE.

Two men were seated in an office-furnished room of a mansion on Sixth street near the State House. They had been for some time engaged in conversation.

One of these men we already know. It was Dorsey Hamilton, the newly-discharged convict. Yet a change had come over him. His clothing was of a more fashionable cut, and the outdoor sun was already beginning to bronze his pale face.

The other was a person to whom we must give some particular attention. He was of average size, and good figure, yet with a muscular swell in his limbs and chest that betokened great strength. His face was close shaven, and his hair cut short. It was an intelligent face, yet with nothing strongly marked in its features. Such a one as we pass by the hundreds every day without giving them special notice. He might have been a quiet man of business, or a plodding professional man. His only strong feature was the eye, which had a very keen way at times of looking at a person,

Cop Colt, the Quaker City Detective.

as if it would look clear through flesh and bones into the depths of the mind. Yet these were but flashes. Ordinarily the eye was as quiet as the rest of the face.

No one, on observing the man on the street, would have dreamed that he was gazing on Coply Colt, usually known as Cop Colt, a noted detective, who had already gained a national reputation, from his neat handling of some difficult jobs.

This was the man to whom Jake Jumper had sent his fugitive friend.

"I know the man," said the detective, looking his visitor in the eye. "It was bull-dog Jerry Thomas, of Judge Norwood's court."

"Then he really had authority? I thought he had some ugly game in hand."

"Can't say," Cop shook his head. "It's a queer story. Needs looking into. I don't say that I will or won't take your case, Mr. Hamilton. I must hear your story. On what charge were you arrested? What evidence convicted you?"

He leaned back in his chair, and picked up a paper-cutter, which he idly balanced on his fingers as he waited for the convict's story.

Dorsey was silent for a minute, while a distasteful expression marked his face. He evidently did not like to rake over the old coals of his past history.

"Five years ago," he slowly began, "I was confidential clerk in the Third street banking-house of Markham & Co. Do you know the firm?"

"Yes. Very solid and reputable. Markham, Flite and Osborn. Osborn the junior partner. All sound on 'change. Confidential clerk, eh? Long with them? Come up with a crawl, or a hop, skip, and jump?"

"I began with them as a boy, and worked my way up."

"Good. Go on." He had just succeeded in getting the paper-cutter balanced on his fingertip.

"One day; the 10th of February, five years ago—I will not soon forget the date—Mr. Markham had to leave the city on important business. Before going he intrusted me with the key of the safe, and the combination word for the lock. It was the first time I had received this trust."

"Did Markham carry the key himself?"

"Generally."

"Was there no duplicate?"

"No."

"But this was not his first absence?"

"On former occasions Mr. Flite or Mr. Osborn received the key."

"Why not now?"

"Mr. Flite had just been married, and could not be expected to be very prompt to business hours. Mr. Osborn was waiting an interview with an important correspondent of the firm at the Continental Hotel. He could not be early on duty. So I was given the key."

"I see. Go on. We must sweep the straws from our path as we advance."

"On the night of February 11th, the second day of Mr. Markham's absence, the safe was opened and robbed. Fifty thousand dollars in hard cash, and some valuable securities and jewels left on deposit, were taken."

The detective nodded.

"I know. I remember the trial. You were arrested. The key was in your possession. Some of the securities were tracked to you. Some of the jewelry was found in your private cabinet. No shadow of suspicion in any other direction. Evidence overwhelming. You were convicted and sentenced."

"There was little need of my telling you a story which you know as well as myself," rejoined Dorsey, a little testily.

"Know? of course I know. I know the outside of all our criminal trials for ten years past. It is the inside of this affair I want to know. The motives. The unconsidered trifles. The straws which we puff away. Yet these straws may be twisted into ropes strong enough to hang a criminal, if skillfully handled. Did you rob the safe?"

"No! By Heaven, no! Why do you ask me such a question?"

"To get such an answer, perhaps," replied Colt with a very faint smile. "If not you, then, who did? You claim to be innocent. Whom do you suspect?"

"No one."

"Not a soul! Think."

"I have been thinking. For five long years I have done nothing but think about this mystery. Yet I can make absolutely nothing of it. The key was in my pocket when I went to bed that night. It was in my pocket when I rose next morning. It would have been of no use to any one else. Nobody but myself had the combination. I did not breathe it to a soul. Yet the safe was robbed. I opened it in the morning in Mr. Markham's presence. He had just returned. The valuables were gone. Some of them were found in my rooms. The money had vanished. I went to prison."

"You bring a charge against no one?"

"No one."

"Was there no suspicious character about the banking house? No fast individual? Had you any intimate friend who might have inadver-

tently got the word from you? Come. Search your memory."

"None. They are all reputable, quiet, respected people. I had no special intimacies."

"The junior members of the firm?"

"Their honor and honesty are unquestionable."

"By Jove, Mr. Hamilton, you interest me," cried Cop with energy, as he dropped the paper-cutter with which he had been idly toying. "This affair smells of a mystery. And mystery is the breath of life to me. I will tell you this, my dear sir, to begin with:—I feel inclined to accept your story that you are innocent of the crime."

"Thank you," said Dorsey gratefully.

"And I fancy you are innocent in other directions. You are not fit to deal with such a question. Men like you fail to consider trifles. You look for things in bulk. Yet a very thin cobweb will hold a very strong fly. It is the cobwebs we look for. Thin circumstances sometimes point the way to thick truths. Are you a married man, Mr. Hamilton?"

"No."

There was something peculiar in the tone of this answer that struck Colt's quick ear. But he made no allusion to it.

"Where did you live at the time of the robbery?"

"At No. — Spring Garden street. It was my mother's house. My father was dead."

"Who else made up the family?"

"A cousin of mine, John Clark; a young lady friend of my mother, Alice Johnson; and a servant, Bridget Flanagan."

"Well. The characters of these people?"

"Excellent. I would as soon think of doubting myself as them."

"Of course. If we want doubters we must go to detectives. They are professional doubters. Had Clark any wild ways? Were you and he intimate associates?"

"No. He was a quiet, respectable fellow. We had little to do with each other except in ordinary home affairs."

"And Miss Johnson! Were you in love with her?"

"Not much!" answered Dorsey, with a laugh. "She was a clever girl, too. But one does not fall in love with all his clever lady friends."

"Thought she might be the woman in the case," muttered Cop to himself. "We are all at sea yet.—How about the kitchen girl?" he continued.

"As stupid as bog turf. Her chief ability was in smashing dishes, and in oversalting the oatmeal porridge."

Colt tapped with his fingers on the table, while he sat a moment in thought.

"Where is your mother now?"

"She still lives in the old house." The answer came sadly. "Almost heart-broken."

"And your cousin, and lady friend?"

"I know not."

"Then let it be your first task to trace them, and find out all you can of their lives both before and since your imprisonment. I admit to you, sir, you have laid me out a hard task. You must help me as far as possible."

"My cousin! This is ridiculous! It is simply impossible that—"

"There! Stop at that. Do you wish me to take this case, or to drop it?"

"To take it, if you will."

"Then don't tell me again that anything is impossible. I will have no such nonsense breathed in this office. Why, man, the impossible is our stock in trade. If we did not have the impossible to deal with detectives would have to go out of business."

"It is ridiculous, at any rate," said Dorsey determinedly. "But I will do what I can. Shall I look up the record of any one else?"

"On your life, no! And don't breathe a word of your intentions. See here, Dorsey Hamilton, you are in more of a net than you imagine, if I don't mistake. Do you suspect any secret history in that order of detention?"

"No. Was it not regular?"

"Hardly. That is my first thread. It may mean nothing. It may mean that you have a secret and powerful enemy. If you have, that enemy knows that you are out of prison. He will be on the *qui vive*. If he discovers that you intend to reopen this case he may destroy every clew, and perhaps get rid of you into the bargain. You must get a situation of some kind, go quietly to work, and seem as if you have no object in the world except to make a decent living. Your coming here may have been a serious mistake. Come here no more. I will take means to find you if I have to communicate with you."

Dorsey sat back, a little aghast. He had not dreamed of looking at the affair in such a light as this. Yet Colt's quiet words carried an impressive depth of meaning. A shadow of dread ran through his mind; the enemy who had sent him for five years to a prison cell might deal with him yet more summarily, if he found himself in danger.

"It is just this," continued the detective, impressively. "If your story is true, then it follows that you have a very deep, shrewd, and ruthless enemy. Such a man is not one to leave an open track behind him. At the date of the

trial it is possible that the trail was utterly hidden. But many shut doors open in five years; men begin to show their hands. Their lives may tell against them. Some evidence may vanish, but other evidence may come into existence. I fancy that I may do more with this matter to-day than would have been possible five years ago. But you must do your best to sink out of sight. A false move may ruin our whole game."

"I doubt my chance of getting a situation," said Dorsey, dejectedly; "my record is against me."

"You can try, at any rate. Don't attempt to deceive any one; tell the plain truth, for everybody will know it. See what you can do with your friends. You may say that you are innocent, if you want, but not a word of seeking the true criminal. Above all, note closely how each of your friends receives you. Don't trust to memory; make a written record of every word. Trifles again, you know."

Dorsey's face brightened. His confidence in the detective was growing.

"But about my cousins and Miss Johnson?" he asked.

"Look them up; let it be off-hand, though—only a friend's natural interest."

Colt leaned back again in his chair, and looked straight at the wall. For full five minutes not a word came from his compressed lips. Dorsey stirred uneasily; he took up his hat.

"Is there anything else?" he asked.

"Don't be in a hurry; I am considering. One word more, Mr. Hamilton. You are not in love with your cousin, you say. What woman, then, are you in love with?"

"With no woman."

This answer was hastily given, while a tell-tale color mounted into Dorsey's pale cheek.

"Come, come, there may be secrets which you conceal from your own heart, but you must conceal nothing from me. Is there no woman whom you worshiped, near or afar? That blush carries a story."

"Worship is the right word," began Dorsey in a low, broken tone. "She no more dreamed of my feeling than the stars dream that we are looking at them. She was too far above me."

"I thought there was a woman in it. There generally is. You said nothing to her of your love?"

"I would not have dared. I have talked with her, but only on details of business. She never dreamed. Thank Heaven she did not, or she would have despised me doubly in my fall."

"Did she return your love?"

"She? Why, she thought no more of me than of the clods that lay beneath her divine foot."

"Sadly smitten," thought Colt, suppressing a furtive smile.

"But she had a lover? Such angels always have. Who was he?"

"No. She was a society belle. There was a swarm of butterflies around her. Some may have loved her, but I doubt if it was returned. Mr. Flite and Osborn both paid attention to her. Flite's attentions were very close. I fancy something happened, for he quickly afterward courted another woman, whom he married at short notice."

"Flite, eh? And this divinity? Who is she?"

"Clare Amberly. A ward of Mr. Markham. Let that rest, sir. I would not have her approached for my life. I would not for worlds have her learn what I have just told you. She has forgotten me now. She would despise me then."

"All right," answered Cop quietly. "I will take your case, Mr. Hamilton. Would you know why?"

"Yes, if you will tell."

"I know old Jake, the good-for-naught that helped you out of your scrape. He has told me all that happened. I believe you are innocent. And now good-day. Don't come here again. I will find means to see you when necessary."

CHAPTER IV.

A MEMBER FROM QUAKER GULCH.

SEVERAL days have passed since the date of our last chapter. Cop Colt, the detective, sits again in his office, in much the attitude in which we left him. He is alone, his hat pushed back on his head, his chair tilted, a look of deep thought on his face.

On the table before him lie several scraps of paper, written on in a firm, bold hand.

"It's a confoundedly deep plot," he said reflectively. "Can't see bottom. Fact is the easiest way out of it is to believe Hamilton guilty. That explains everything. But it don't explain Hamilton himself. I am not a bad hand at seeing through men, and I incline to take him at his word. What's more there are loop-holes in the evidence. I've read the trial docket. It has weak points. The worst is it does not throw a shadow on anybody else."

He took up a pipe from the table, deliberately filled and lighted it, and leaned back again, sending up puff after puff of blue smoke toward the ceiling.

After a few minutes he took up one of the slips of paper before him, and ran his eye rapidly over its contents.

"Silas Markham," he read. "Age, sixty. Habits, quiet. Deacon in S. Luke's church. Wealthy. Forty years brok'r business. Easy-going. Trusty dispsitio. Believed in Hamilton. Loth to think him guilty."

He replaced the slip and took up another.

"Westly Osborn. Age, twenty-eight. Handsome. Fashionable. Fr. quents the best society. Member of Oriental Club. Wild young men there. High play some ines. Osborn don't touch the cards."

He stopped reading, and looked reflectively at what followed.

"Nephew of Markham. Six years in firm. Said to be worth his million. Made some heavy outside deals in oil an railroads. A daring but wily operator. Intimate with Miss Amberly."

Dropping this paper he took up a third, which he ran over in the same broken manner as the others.

"Joseph Flite. Age, thirty-five. Five years married. House at Bryn Mawr. Mansion in town. Tea years in firm. Close stickler for business. Poor st member. Got bit in speculatio. Sheers off now. Down on Hamilton heavy. Pushed the prosecution. Markham and Osborn let up on him, but Flite drove it through. Stern character. Few words. Has secrets. Said to have been jilted by Clara Amberly. Nobody knows what passed between them. But Flite suddenly took up with another woman, and married her off-hand."

Colt dropped the paper and fell into a deep cogitation.

"Hamilton declares that the girl did not care a jot for him. But modest lovers are apt to think that way. What if she was in love with him? What if Flite found out the snag in his path, and got up this little scheme to scorch his rival, or to revenge himself on the girl? His marrying another woman may have been pure spite. Hang me, if here isn't the shadow of a motive—the first I've spied yet! Flite, eh? Is he the man? By Jove! I begin to think so. Newly married? Couldn't come early to business? Where was he on the night of February 11th, 1870? That's a point to find out."

There were other slips of paper, which he picked up and examined successively. He finally flung them back on the table.

"I see nothing there. The clerks of the firm are all sober, docile, poor folks. Well sorted. No fast men among them. John Dobbins has money, but it came from his uncle. No one swinging a spare fifty thousand."

He slowly folded the papers, marked and dated them, and put them on file. Then he shook the ashes from his pipe, laid it on the table, and settled his hat firmly on his head. He walked to the door of the room. For a minute he stood, with his hand resting on the door-knob.

"That order from Judge Norwood? How shall it be handled? There's a cat in the cream there. Spenser and Jones at the prison both say that no such order came. Jerry Thomas knows nothing about it. Joe Sharp is just as ignorant. Wonder if the judge would deny it. It looks decidedly as if these men had been schooled. But why? There's a deep mystery somewhere behind that order, and in that mystery lies the first clew to this ugly case. A game was tried. It failed. It must be hidden. General denial will do that. There's only Hamilton's word to the contrary. I would believe Hamilton was lying to me only for Jake Jumper. What that old chap says is gospel for Cop Colt."

There was a very odd smile on his face as he left the room. In a minute more he was in the street, and in front of the court buildings. A handsome carriage, drawn by a pair of spanking bays, drove up, and was brought to a halt beside the pavement. Judge Norwood stepped out, and walked briskly toward the Quarter Sessions court.

Colt's attention had been attracted. A peculiar light shone in his eye as he walked up to the carriage, whose driver was preparing to set off again.

"A handsome team you have there, my good fellow."

"Well, rather," answered the gratified coachman.

"I like the make-up of those bays. Fast?"

"Summat lively."

"Any chap could see that. How long have you been driving the judge?"

"This is my first trip. Just set up his team. Used to travel on foot, or in the hoss cars."

"I thought so."

Cop walked away. He had learned all he desired.

"The judge is suddenly flush," he cogitated. "Got hold of some money he can spare. Sets up his carriage. Wonder if there was any cash behind that prison order? Rather too much style here for a judge's salary. I hardly think Judge Norwood is open to bribery. But he was always inclined to cut a dash. Looks doubtful. Some men give way easily to temptation."

Colt walked on down the street. He began to fancy that the remote end of the clew to the mystery was in his hands. How to follow it up was now the subject of his thoughts. There are trails that wind for miles, over rocks and plains, through woods and waters. Yet a sharp-eyed scout will follow them through all their windings. He was such a scout, and on such a trail. He had never yet begun to trace a crime by

shadowing a judge. It seemed wild and idle, yet, as he had told Hamilton, the impossible was his stock in trade.

Leaving Cop Colt to his walk we must betake ourselves to another locality. Third street between Market and Walnut, is the Wall street of Philadelphia. Here the exchanges are situated. In the vicinity gather the most important banks. Here, day after day, a wild stream of business sets in, millions change hands, fortunes are made or lost in the turn of a stock, gambling adventurers flow in multitudes into the bottomless pool of speculation.

There is little here of the business insanity of some other cities. The wild horses of trade have not broken their reins. The exchange is not quite a den of lunatics. Yet no small amount of business is done, and many a risky fool is sucked into the maelstrom, and utterly lost in its ever whirling flood.

Into one of the brokers' offices on this street we wish to conduct the reader. Outside it bore the sign of Markham & Co. It was among the larger and older firms on the street, and was well known as a sober and safe concern.

Inside an active business was going on. A dozen clerks and bookkeepers were actively engaged. Customers were steadily coming and going. The rattle of gold and silver, the peculiar rustle of bank-note paper, sounded over that counter all day long.

Back of the main office was an inner room, the private office of the members of the firm.

Here Mr. Markham was seated. He was a white-haired man, with heavy brows, and a deeply-lined face. There was business shrewdness in his countenance, but there were also the trade-marks of a benevolent disposition, and a trust in human nature.

With him was Mr. Osborn, to whom we have already been introduced. Each was seated at a separate desk, busily engaged in writing.

At this moment a customer entered the establishment, who attracted the quick attention of all the disengaged clerks.

He was a man of stout build, and dressed in a rough suit of corduroy pants and vest, over which he wore a loose coat of rough beaver cloth, that swagged half-way to his heels. His boots looked as if they had done duty in a month's quarrying.

Long hair, that swept his shoulders; a heavy, unkempt beard and mustache; a deeply-tanned and lined face, with shaggy eyebrows, made up the countenance of this strange individual. He wore a broad-brimmed hat, well-creased and dusted. His right hand grasped a cane that might have served for a cudgel.

This rough stranger walked up with a heavy stride to the counter. There he rested his cane hand, while he rolled his eyes with a sharp gaze from one to another of the clerks. He seemed seeking some familiar face.

"What can I do for you?" asked one of the younger men.

"Git out of my light," came the reply, in a rasping voice. "Want to twig that chap ahind ye. Thar. Now t'other 'un in the corner. Shoot me fur a jack-rabbit if I b'lieve my man's here, arter all."

"You are looking for some one, then? Can you give the name? Some of our gentlemen are out."

"Yer gen'lemen, hey? Got back 'mong gen'lemen, hev I? Whar I come from ther ain't no sich critters. Ef a chap come 'round thar, boy, rigged out like ye, we'd duck him in a goosepond."

"Come, sir. We want none of that here," spoke a sharp voice behind the youth. "This is a business house. State your business, or make room for the next."

"Best say it's a barber shop. That's the on'y place I know on whar they yell out 'next.' Ain't boss shaver, be ye?"

The old fellow fixed his eyes on the man who had so sharply accosted him. He saw a tall, slim man, with a dark, stern face, his hair and whiskers being jet-black in hue. There was a sour expression about his thin lips, and a look of cunning in the lines around his little, twinkling eyes.

"It is of little importance who I am. Your business, sir. You are in the way of others."

"One o' the bosses, hey?" asked the imperturbable old fellow.

"Yes. If you will know. I am Mr. Flite, a member of the firm. Now, sir, please make haste."

An odd look shot across the old man's face on hearing the name. He rested both elbows on the counter, and looked up in the broker's face with an apologetic air.

"Ye see, Flite, I'm jest from California," he remarked. "Clear through from Quaker Gulch. My name it's Job Benson. Got the spondulicks. Been prospectin' ten years."

"Want to invest?" queried Mr. Flite, with a sudden interest.

"Mought, mebbe. But 'tain't just that yit. I'm tryin' to sort out a nevvy of mine as was in this 'stablishment when I dug 'cross country, more nor ten year back. Been squintin' round, but don't see the boy's phiz. Calkerlated I'd slop over yer, and set that youngster on his legs."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Flite. "I am glad to know you, Mr. Benson. So you are the uncle of one of our young men? How do you do, sir?"

"Sorter clever," and he grasped the broker's outstretched hand with a crushing grip. "How de do yerself, hoss? Now I like that. That's kinder sociable."

"But what is the young man's name?" asked Mr. Flite, rescuing his hand with some difficulty from the bear-like hug.

"Tain't same as music. It's my sister's boy, ye see. Dorsey Hamilton's the handle he swings."

A general low exclamation followed this name. Evidently everybody had been listening. Mr. Flite retreated a step. His face changed under the sharp eyes of the old man.

"Your nephew is not here," he answered, hesitating. "He has not been here for years. You will probably find him living with his mother, who you say is your sister, at No.—Spring Garden street."

"Not yere?" He looked around him dubiously. "What's the row? Last I heered o' the boy he was swimmin' ahead. Didn't git tricky, hey? Didn't kick in the shafts? If the young rascal played ugly, hang him if I leave him a pick-a-yune! Plant out, hoss. What's the diffikilty?"

Mr. Flite hesitated for a minute. Then he spoke with a resolute air.

"He served us a very ugly trick, sir. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you must learn the truth sooner or later. Please step back into the inner office. This matter had better be discussed in private."

Old Job looked at him with some show of consternation in his wrinkled face. Then he brought his heavy cane to the floor with a thundering rap.

"Ef he's disgraced his name I'll cut the rascal off with a bad sixpence. Hang his young hide! Tain't my sort to root for gold for ten year to copperplate a vagabond. Forge ahead. I'm yer hoss."

He followed Mr. Flite with a lumbering step, bringing his cane down heavily on the floor at every stride. In a minute more he was ushered into the inner office, in the presence of the other members of the firm.

Five minutes afterward the story was told. Mr. Flite had apprised his partners of the stranger's business, and had told old Job the story of his nephew's recreant conduct in a hard, unsympathetic tone that brought a severe look to the old man's eyes.

He gazed with a pitiful expression from one to the other of the partners, resting both hands heavily on the head of his cane.

"Ye ain't all goin' to say that o' my nevy? I'm loth to think it on him."

"I too was loth to believe it," said Mr. Markham, kindly. "He had always been a good boy, and I put every confidence in him. But the evidence was too strong. Some unfortunate temptation overcame his honesty, I fear."

"And what's you got ter say, young man?" queried old Job of Mr. Osborn.

"I must repeat Mr. Markham's words," answered the young man, in a tone of sympathy. "I thought a great deal of Dorsey, and his crime was a hard blow to me."

"And what's your verdick?" to Flite.

"I think that these gentlemen are entirely too soft-hearted," came the severe answer, while Mr. Flite's black brows gathered into a frown. "Crime is crime. I am not the man to throw rose-water on one who has robbed me of a fortune. I pity you, old man. It is sorry news for you. But I cannot forget that your nephew basely stung the hands that trusted him."

The old man turned his face slowly from one speaker to the other, his wrinkled features strongly working.

"If I thought it," he began. Then, bringing his cane down heavily to the floor, he roared out. "It's a lie! It's all a rascally lie! Tain't in the blood o' the boy! He's been foully dealt with. Some chap's put up that job on him, and sent him to rot in jail, while he sported with the cash. By the great Rocky Mountain rhinoceros I'm goin' to prospect this job! I'm goin' to try placer minin' on it! And when I dig that fox outer his hole, won't I make him squirm? Well, mebbe I won't!"

As he gave utterance to this threat his eyes move defiantly from face to face of the firm members. Mr. Markham sat in kindly pity. Mr. Osborn's face wore a faint smile. Mr. Flite looked hard and harsh, as if quite ready to take the offered challenge.

"Thar! That's enough on't. Tain't worth while to pile up words. Good-day, gents. Ye'll hear from me ag'in. When the buffer of Quaker Gulch is waked up he's a rip snorter, now I tell you. And I mean biz."

He stamped out of the office, with thundering blows of his heavy cane.

The members of the firm sat looking at each other as if a tornado had just passed over their heads.

CHAPTER V. THE YOUNG MAN IN BROWN.

OLD JOB BENSON formed a strong contrast to the throng of people who were hastily coming

and going in the main corridor of the Continental Hotel, and many an eye was turned curiously toward the strangely attired figure. His eyes were no less active. No one entered without passing under the keen glance that shot from under the shaggy eyebrows. He leaned one shoulder against the wall of the passage, with his heavy coat thrown open, and his thumbs in the buttonholes, as he kept his eyes roving from face to face.

Many stopped at the clerk's desk to make inquiries or to register their names. Some looked over the register, as if seeking the names of friends. These the old miner particularly watched, though with a sidewise glance.

A half-hour of this quiet surveillance passed. Then a personage stopped at the book, a slender, tall young fellow, dressed in a suit of unobtrusive brown.

Job watched him without seeming to do so.

He ran his eyes quickly down the open page of the register. Then, with his finger on a name, asked a question of the clerk.

The latter gave an amused smile, and looked around him. He then pointed across the corridor to the masked figure of old Job, who yet stood immovably in the spot which he had occupied for near an hour.

The questioner's eyes followed the direction of the pointing finger, in one quick, sharp glance.

"There's your man. A queer old cove too, I should say."

"Thanks. It's the right name, but not the right man. I never saw the old coon before, and wouldn't like to claim him as one of my friends."

A laugh passed between the two men as the questioner walked away, paying no further attention to the old Westerner.

Not a move in this by-play had escaped the Californian's eyes, though he seemed to be looking in quite another direction. An odd smile curled his bearded lips.

"Takes the hook," he muttered.

He continued to occupy his position for five minutes more. The young man in brown had disappeared in the inner regions of the hotel.

Old Job now left his station and strode into the smoking-room, aiding his steps with his heavy cane.

There he lit a cigar, took a newspaper from his pocket, and leaned back in an easy-chair, seemingly deeply engaged in reading the news.

Ten minutes afterward the young man in brown strolled into the same room, and lit his cigar, while he stood easily in the doorway chatting with an acquaintance.

The same odd smile came upon the old fellow's face, though it was hidden behind his paper. He had not failed to catch a quick glance of the young man around the room, which rested for a simple second on his form.

"Swallows the bait," muttered Job.

The news had suddenly become very interesting. He seemed to be reading his paper down to the last advertisement.

But he took the opportunity, under the screen of the journal, to scribble a few hasty lines in pencil on a scrap of paper.

This he folded into a small space and concealed in the hollow of his hand.

The young man in brown was still keeping up his chat.

Job dropped his paper, took a few long puffs at his cigar, and then flung the remnant into the spittoon.

He got up heavily, stretched himself, and turned to his next neighbor.

"Know anything 'bout this yere village?" he asked. "I'm wuss lost yereaways than if I'd been let down in a thicket o' chapperal. Streets run straight enough, I s'pose, but every durned one on 'em runs straight to nowhere."

"I am at home here," answered his neighbor, with a laugh.

"I ain't, and don't soon 'spect to be. Sooner be corralled in a bight o' the Rockies. Kin you put me on the trail o' Spring Garden street? Reckon that's my port."

"Straight up town," returned the other, pointing out the proper direction. "About eight squares."

"Thankee kindly. Guess I'll run it down."

He strode heavily away, leaving his informant laughing behind him. Old Job's long, trailing coat, his broad-brimmed slouch hat, the general cut of his figure, made him a man of mark among the sprucely-dressed *habitués* of the hotel.

Most of them turned to look at him with a stare, or a smile of amusement. But he rolled on, oblivious to all this.

One rude chap however, laughed in his face.

"What ye sn'ckerin' about?" queried the old man, with a frowning look. "Reckon I ain't a hippopotamus, or a rhinoceros."

"Excuse me. I thought I knew you," answered the rude youth.

"Know me, hey? How de do? Allers glad to see old cronies." He caught the young man's hand and gave it a pump-handle shake. "Ain't ye got a bit the best o' me, though? Never see'd yer ugly phiz afore."

"Maybe I have," answered the youth, a little

nettled at the laugh that broke out around him. "I thought it was my old friend, Joseph Pump-handle, of Pumpkinville."

"Reckon it arn't. Don't kalkerate that's my handle."

Old Job rolled on, with his tongue in his cheek.

Yet in this by-play there was more meaning than appeared on the surface. In shaking hands with the youth the Californian had managed to transfer to him the closely-folded scrap of paper.

The recipient took a quick private opportunity to unfold and read it.

Then he quietly tore it into minute fragments.

He looked around him. There was the gentleman in brown. He had ended his chat, and was walking out of the hotel, his eyes fixed on the figure of old Job, who was just passing through the doorway.

A meaning smile came upon the knowing countenance of the youth.

"Sharp as a steel-trap," he muttered. "But you bet he's got to get up early to beat the old man. It's a very pretty little game as it stands."

He put himself on the track of the young man in brown. It was a triple trail. What it all meant did not appear, but it was evident that there was a neat game of some sort afoot.

It was now late afternoon. Old Job strolled up Eighth street, apparently not caring to take a car. The bright shop-windows of that business avenue seemed to engage his attention, and every now and then he stopped to examine one of them more closely.

He also occasionally stopped a passer to inquire his way. In all these occasions he managed to look back along the street.

"Nipped," he muttered. "The gudgeon bites."

He had seen the young man in brown, stealing along on the other side of the street, at some distance back.

Still further in the rear was a youth in a black felt hat and cut-away coat, strolling easily along. It was the person with whom he had shaken hands in the Continental.

"It's a very neatly laid bit of business," said the old man to himself. "I never saw trout bite better or sharper. I must reel out and give them plenty of line. But if I don't land my fish, then no shiner was ever brought ashore with a spring rod."

He had dropped his western dialect in these words. But the western swing was kept up. He seemed walking over the rocks of Quaker Gulch rather than on the pavements of the Quaker City.

Twenty minutes brought him to the locality of which he was in search. He turned into Spring Garden street, and stopped in front of No. —. It was the house which Dorsey Hamilton had mentioned as the residence of his mother.

The young man in brown hurried briskly up, as if anxious to hear what passed at the door. He was disappointed. The old fellow had pushed into the house when the bell was answered and closed the door behind him.

The third member of the trio came to a halt at the street-corner, where he stood switching his boot with his light cane, and seemingly with eyes only for the faces of the passing ladies. He appeared a street-corner fop of the first water.

But leaving this brace of spies outside we must follow old Job into the residence of Mrs. Hamilton, whom he had claimed as his sister.

The door had been opened by a middle-aged lady, with a face that had once been handsome, but which was deeply marked with the footprints of grief and trouble.

She drew back in alarm and displeasure, as the visitor pushed into the house and closed the door behind him.

"Reckon I'm talkin' to Miss Hamilton?" he queried.

"That is my name, sir."

"Thought so. You don't know me?"

He leaned both hands on his cane, and looked into her eyes.

"No, sir; I never saw you before." She gave no sign of sisterly recognition.

"Thought you wouldn't. Don't know you, neither." He gave an odd chuckle. "It's yer son, ma'am, I'm arter—Dorsey Hamilton. I'm told as he's lookin' for a situation."

"He was, sir; but he has a place."

"Sorry for that. Got an openin' for him." Yet the old man's face had changed slightly at her words. "Couldn't I see the lad?"

"Do you wish to see me, sir?"

It was Dorsey's voice. He was on the stairway, looking down.

"Reckon so, if so be's you're Dorsey Hamilton."

Dorsey walked down-stairs.

"I heard what you told my mother," he said. "I am much obliged for your kindness; but I have made another engagement, and cannot accept your situation. I am grateful for the offer, however."

"Kinder late, am I? Can't ye shift?"

"No, sir; I am bound by my word."

"Proper sorry to hear that."

He stepped forward, leaned toward the surprised youth, and whispered a single word in his ear.

If Dorsey had been stung by a snake, he could not have started back more hastily, or looked at his visitor with an air of greater astonishment. There was a smile of amusement on old Job's face.

"S'pose ye won't 'ject to a private interview?"

"No, no!" cried Dorsey. "Mother, I have some business with this gentleman."

"Certainly, my son," answered Mrs. Hamilton, while her eyes turned upon her handsome son with a look of loving pride.

"Please walk up this way, sir."

Dorsey led the way up-stairs with a nervous eagerness unlike his usual manner.

They entered a front room at the head of the stairs.

"Now, sir." He turned hastily to his visitor. "I was never more surprised. How did you know?" He surveyed the odd figure with a dubious glance. "What am I to understand?"

"I'm yer uncle, boy. Don't ye reckernise me? I'm yer rich California uncle, that's been gold-rootin' these ten years."

He had seated himself, leaned his chin on his cane, and was looking quizzically into the face of the surprised young man.

"My California uncle? I have no California uncle!"

"Now don't you bet high on that. Who's goin' to git my pile if you go back on old Job Benson?"

"This is nonsense. I have no uncle, I tell you. Who are you? What was the meaning of that whisper?"

"Didn't s'pose ye'd reckernise old Job Benson. Been ten year in the diggin's. Got my pile o' dust. You'd best put that down in yer log book."

He gave Dorsey a peculiar look, that checked the renewed denial he was on the point of making. He fell into a chair, and stared at his strange visitor.

"S'pose ye pull down them thar curtins at the front winders," suggested the old fellow.

"Mought be somebody spyin' in on our family gatherin'."

Dorsey hastened to obey. His head was in a whirl. There was something here which he could not get at the bottom of.

"Now, sir," he remarked, turning from the lowered curtains, "an explanation will be in order. There is enough of—" He paused, with an exclamation of surprise, while his eyes were fixed with an astonished air on the man before him.

Old Job's hat was off, and his hair had come with it. His long white beard and mustache had also vanished, and revealed a smooth-shaven face. The shaggy eyebrows, and the wrinkles of the upper face were still there.

"Cop Colt!" cried the young man, with a gesture of amazement.

It was indeed the face of the noted detective.

"Just so, my hearty. I've been masquerading a trifle. So you didn't know me?" Cop gave a meaning laugh.

"Know you? Old Nick wouldn't have known you!"

There was, indeed, the short brown hair, and the smooth, shrewd countenance of the celebrated thief-hunter. Dorsey could hardly believe his own eyes.

"That is only one of my shapes," laughed Cop. "I can put on as many as old Proteus. Tell you what, Dorsey, I've done a neat piece of work for you, under the skin of your nice California uncle. Don't forget that there is such an uncle; name Job Benson, from Quaker Gulch. Piles of spondulicks."

"Have you learned anything?" asked Dorsey eagerly.

"Only prospecting, my boy. But I fancy I've hit a nice lead. Do you know why I have called on you to-day?"

"Certainly not."

"It is because I am under shadow."

"Under shadow?"

"Yes. I have a spy on my track. It is natural for a long-lost brother to call on his sister and nephew, you see. I want to keep up my character."

"A spy? Spying a detective? Who put him on you?"

"I'll give you a clean hundred if you'll answer your own question. That is the point I am bound to know. I can tell you this much. If I am not sadly mistaken he is in the pay of one of the firm of Markham & Co."

"One of the firm?" Dorsey retreated in astonishment.

"As sure as you live. Unless they have been blabbing. I have called on them, sworn you were foully dealt with, and vowed to see you righted, and to use all my fortune to unearth the real rascal."

"Ah!"

"The rogue has bitten, as I intended. Your secret foe, whoever he is, has taken the alarm, and is tracking my footsteps. I tell you, Hamilton, I am proud of that job. It has been very neatly worked."

"And what is the next move?"

"I have my shadow on the spy already," laughed the detective. "They'll find that Cop Colt is an old hand at that game."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DETECTIVE QUESTIONS HIS CLIENT.

"Now, Dorsey, unload."

Cop Colt had seated himself in an easy-chair, leaned back with his foot on the table-leg, and was taking things very easily.

"Unload?"

"Isn't that good English? You don't imagine that I took the trouble to get myself up in this disguise, and come here, for mere pastime? When I make a move like that it means business."

"But I don't understand—"

"Then I will give you a lift. What have you learned? Tell me everything you know. That is what I am here for. So you have already succeeded in getting a situation?"

"Yes, sir. And quite unexpectedly. And a very satisfactory one, too."

"Ah! That's good news. There was a twinkle in Cop's eyes. How was it? Your friends let up on the jail-bird business did they?"

"No," answered Dorsey, with a frown. "It was not a friend. A mere business acquaintance. The fact is my friends treated me very coldly. Shabbily, I might say, but I didn't expect anything else. I gave it up in despair, Mr. Colt. I had about made up my mind to leave the city, and go somewhere in the West where I was unknown. I was completely disengaged."

"When you thought of this party?"

"Rather he thought of me. He called here upon me, told me that he wanted a trusty book-keeper, and knew my ability of old. He said he believed that I was innocent, and he proved it by giving me a position at a very fair salary."

"A position of trust? With financial responsibilities?"

"Yes, sir. I could rob the man if I was the rogue they make me out. What do you think of that?" He spoke triumphantly.

"I think your new employer is the most extraordinary person I've heard of for an age," said Cop with energy. "He's quite a perfect lamb of innocence and benevolence. I like to hear of such cherubs. It does one good in this wicked world. What is the name of this phenomenon?"

Dorsey did not like the sarcastic tone of these words. He looked up half angrily into the sober face of the detective.

"William Warren. Wholesale groceries. Has a good business on Water street."

Cop made an entry in his note-book.

"One more. An excellent man, I've no doubt. And you're just the tenderest lamb I've met in a month. Warren is a good business man, then? Sharp and shrewd, I suppose?"

"Yes. He has that reputation."

"Then take my advice, and carry no safe-keys. Refuse to be responsible for money. If asked why, you can quote your record as an excuse."

"But, Mr. Colt—"

"Now stop right there. I don't know your Mr. Warren. But I know this. Sharp and shrewd business people, no matter how benevolent they are, don't offer financial temptations to a man only a week out of prison, without an object. Now what is that object? Mr. Warren is either a fool or a knave. If it is the latter you may be in danger. I fancy I see the hand of your enemy in this business."

"But what can he do?"

"He can let you alone if you let him alone. He can send you to prison again if you show your hand against him," rejoined Cop impressively. "Suppose you should begin to hunt him close. Then money may be missing from Mr. Warren's strong box. It may be traced to you. Then you are arrested. Your old record tells hard against you with a jury. Off to Cherry Hill you go again. It is a very neatly-laid scheme, and you were a booby to take such a position."

Dorsey listened with a sense of horror. Was he really surrounded by such a network of schemes? Could it be that his secret foe had him already in his power? His veins grew cold at the thought.

"What shall I do?" he asked helplessly. "Shall I give up the situation?"

"No, no, don't think of such folly. In games like ours a step backward is worse than ten steps forward. What I have said is but a theory. I don't know your Mr. Warren, as I have told you. But I will know him, and all about him, before he is a week older. I will pin him down in my cabinet like a butterfly, with his wings full spread. Then if anything is found to confirm my suspicions we will know how to act."

"By Heaven, sir, I feel like a fly in a spider's web, with a poisonous insect creeping toward me, and myself powerless to escape. I have half a mind to throw overboard my revenge, and fly from this terrible city. I cannot endure this."

"That is just what you are, Dorsey Hamilton, a fly in a spider's web," answered Cop, with a smile of decided gratification. "It may not be

pleasant for you. It is the spice of life to me. We have here the neatest bit of mystery I've touched for ten years, and I will not have you spoil it by any wild scare. Let the spider crawl. He cannot crawl without shaking his lines. I have my hands on some of them already. I will touch more ere long. I will hunt him step by step over his web to his lurking-place, and there I will crush him without mercy."

The tone of the speaker was cold and harsh. His eye glittered with keen fire.

"You are not a coward," he continued severely. "I took you for a man of nerve and courage. You don't look like the man that would crouch to be whipped."

"Nor am I!" cried Dorsey hotly. "That dreadful prison life has taken some of the spirit out of me. But it is coming back. I only want some hope."

"Then take it. I will hunt your secret foe down if it keeps me a lifetime."

"Thank you, Colt." Dorsey grasped the detective's hand, and the two men looked earnestly in each other's eyes. "Tell me what I am to do, and trust me that I will not fail you. Even if it be to take my enemy by the throat and choke the truth out of him."

"Good. That is the spirit I want to see. But to business. There are two persons I bade you inquire about. Have you done so?"

"John Clark, my cousin, and my mother's friend, Alice Johnson?"

"Those two. What have you learned?"

"Nothing very agreeable about my cousin," answered Dorsey. "He was, as I told you, a quiet, sober, respectable man."

"Just so. Has he lost that reputation?"

"Sadly, I fear. Immediately after my arrest and conviction he left the house, and took boarding in another part of the city. Shortly afterward he seems to have fallen into dissipated habits. He neglected his business, and was discharged by his employer. But this seems to have made no difference. He appears to be well supplied with money. How he gets it I cannot answer."

Cop listened to this with much interest. He made some further entries in his note-book.

"This is very interesting information," he remarked. "You had best not look him up any further; leave him to me. It is not safe for you to show your hand. Can you give me his present directions?"

Dorsey did so, and they were duly noted down in that valuable note-book, opposite the name of John Clark.

"Now the young lady, Alice Johnson. What is her record?"

"The best," answered Dorsey, with warm feeling. "She remained here, as the companion of my mother, for three years after I went to prison, and was as tender and affectionate as if she had been her own daughter. Two years ago she left the city, and went to reside with some relative of hers in the North. I believe she is there yet."

"Where? What is this relative's name?"

"At Clifton, New Hampshire. Name, George Cornwall."

"Might as well take note of it. That line of the web seems to end here. Yet it is an old habit with me to follow the thin as well as the strong trails. At any rate I may inquire if Miss Alice Johnson is still at Clifton."

The shrewd detective leaned back in his chair, and passed his hand reflectively over his chin. Dorsey looked at him anxiously.

"Well?" he replied. "How does it look? Is there any hope?"

"Yes, and no. I am in the dark yet, but there is light ahead. All my lines may lead to blind ends. It is impossible to say. Yet I have hope."

"Then I have. Another thing, Mr. Colt. This may prove very expensive. My means are limited. I will do my best, to the last penny. My mother also has some means But—"

"There," waving his hand. "I do not intend to fleece you. If I fail you can pay me day's wages. If I succeed you may be put in better circumstances. I have something of the sleuth-hound's instinct, Dorsey Hamilton. I will not leave the trail I have taken up, though the path be not paved with a dollar. My honor is engaged to trace the hand that is pulling these strings."

"Thanks. Many thanks. One thing more. Whither do your suspicions point? Have you formed any opinion yet?"

Cop was slow in answering. He rubbed his nose, and ran his fingers through his short hair. At length he turned quickly to the questioner.

"Are you sure that Clare Amberly did not return your love?"

"Sure?" Dorsey stared in surprise. "She never gave me a second thought."

"That may be a lover's blindness. Perhaps she thought you as cold."

"I was always very distant and respectful."

"But words are not all. Love deals in other language."

"She was always very kind and soft-toned. She had the sweetest and mildest eyes."

"I want you to call on her."

"Call on her? When? How? On what plea? It is impossible."

He was alarmed and dumfounded.

"Nothing is impossible, I tell you. I want you to call on her. I will settle the when and how. Trust me to find a good reason. There is much depends upon it. Her manner of receiving you may prove the key to the whole mystery."

"You don't mean—" Dorsey stopped half choked with indignation.

"That she is in the plot? Why, you love-blind ninny, I never dreamed of such a thing. I am feeling for motives, my man. The world is ruled by motives."

He rose and began to re-adjust his disguise. The wig, with its long curly hair was replaced, and covered with the broad-brimmed hat. Another movement and the shaggy mustache and whiskers covered the lower part of his face. The keen-faced detective had in a minute been transformed into Job Benson, the rough California miner.

"Thar. Old Job's hisself ag'in. Reckon I'll absquatulate. Fork over that bit o' wood, boy. Yer old uncle ain't as spry on his timbers as he once was. Mebbe I'd best go and hunt my shad-der, as I left out in the cold street."

Dorsey gazed in amazement on the transformation, that looked to him almost the work of magic. The acting and expression were perfect.

Then he broke into a merry laugh.

"You are an adept in disguise," he said.

"Calkerlate I'm a bit spry."

"One word, Mr. Colt. You have suspicions, you say. May I ask toward whom they point?"

"Toward Joseph Flite, the man who hounded you to prison."

"Joseph Flite?"

"Let that go no further. Now, ar'n't ye ready, boy, to show yer old Californy uncle to the door?"

The detective's voice and manner had completely changed. He seemed thoroughly the old westerner he represented. Dorsey gazed at him a moment in astonishment. He then broke into a laugh as he led the way down-stairs.

"You will win yet, Cop Colt," he ejaculated.

"I feel it. I will be revenged."

"You kin bet yer pile o' dust on that," was the answer. "I'm goin' to tunnel this yere rock. Good-by, lad." They were at the open door. "Yer old uncle won't fergit ye when he comes to spread his pile."

With a shake of the hand he strode heavily away. Dorsey stood at the door following him with his eyes.

In a minute after he saw one person, who had been lounging close by, stroll carelessly on, in the old man's track. Two minutes afterward a second person, who stood on the nearest street corner, had business in the same direction.

The triple trail was again in play.

CHAPTER VII.

A DRIVE TO BELMONT.

"I HAVE only one thing to say, judge, and that is that you have a confoundedly good taste in horseflesh."

Judge Norwood smiled pleasantly. He liked the flavor of the compliment. He was out exercising his new team, and had picked up the detective, Cop Colt, by the way.

"They are spankers," declared the judge. He could afford to unbend his official dignity when he was out pleasureing.

"As neat a pair of goers as I've seen in the Park," returned Cop, admiring their points.

They were driving over the firm roadway of Fairmount Park, among the numerous stylish vehicles which crowded that favorite drive.

"Why don't you set up your own team, Mr. Colt?" inquired the judge. "You have done some good jobs of work, and should have a fair bank account by this time."

"More glory than cash," laughed the detective. "We thief-catchers only ply the rod, judge. You handle the fish."

"Not very big ones," answered the judge, quickly. "Our salaries are not overwhelming."

"Yet you drive an expensive team."

"I have just had an outside windfall." This was spoken a little hastily. "A cousin in England. It is a very comfortable thing to have rich relatives, especially when they are kind enough to die."

"Very," Cop echoed the judge's laugh.

Yet he noticed that Judge Norwood had not expressly stated that he had received a legacy.

"By the way, judge, if I may change the subject, I have had a curious case offered to me recently. I speak of it to you as it is one that you know something about."

They were now crossing Girard Avenue Bridge toward the west Park.

"Ah!" said the judge, with interest. "Something that has been in my hands?"

"Yes. It concerns one Dorsey Hamilton. You remember him?"

Cop's eyes were fixed on the judge's face more keenly than the latter imagined.

There was a slight movement, and a momentary quick drawing of the breath. Then Judge Norwood was his cool self again.

"Yes. I sent him to the penitentiary for six years. He was convicted of robbery."

"He is out again; as of course you know. One year remitted for good behavior."

"I ordered the remission of sentence," answered the judge, coolly. "His report was excellent."

"Speaking of that," rejoined Dorsey quickly, "he tells me an odd story. I am in doubt what to think of it. I fancy, however, it is a lie. He declares that you revoked his order of release after he had been discharged, and that a couple of the officers of your court tried to arrest him again in the street."

The judge perceptibly reddened under the detective's glance. He was silent a moment, as if not quite ready to trust his voice.

"I have heard that story," he at length answered, in a low, steady voice. "Depend upon it, the man has some interest in deceiving you. I had a thought of withdrawing my reprieve for certain reasons. I even spoke of it. A great deal comes from a little nowadays, you know. I fancy if you were to question the prison officials or to interview Jerry Thomas, they would tell you there was nothing in it."

"Ah!" answered Cop, "I am glad to hear that. That decides me. If you had really concluded to remand him I would take it for granted that he is a rogue in grain. But if he has behaved so well in prison, I feel like taking up his case."

"What is his case?" asked the judge, hastily.

"He claims to be innocent. Says he was condemned through the arts of a wily enemy."

"Don't believe it," exclaimed the judge. "He came before me, and I know how to sift evidence. He was guilty to the bone. If you take my advice you will keep clear of any such job."

"Why, if you really think so."

"I certainly do."

"Then that settles it. Say nothing about this, judge, I beg you. I was approached in confidence."

"All right," laughed the judge. "I am your father-confessor. All secrets are safe with me."

He turned his attention to the horses. There was a look of satisfaction on his face that did not escape Cop's quick eyes. The detective fell into a brown study as they whirled onward through the Park.

He could not say that Judge Norwood had lied. He had said nothing positive. But he had certainly attempted to deceive him. And why had he tried to prevent him from taking Dorsey's case? Was he afraid to have a detective's keen senses at work? Was there something in his own dealing that would not bear the light? Cop smiled grimly. The daylight ahead was growing brighter.

A few minutes brought them to the hill on which stood the old-fashioned residence of Belmont.

It was a mansion of Revolutionary fame, once the residence of Judge Peters, a celebrated jurist of the past. More than one of the great men of our country's early days had been entertained in that humble edifice, now converted into a park restaurant.

As they drew near the rich strains of a brass-band pulsed on the evening air. Dozens of vehicles stood around. Others were steadily coming and going. A throng of people surrounded the tables under the great trees in front.

Throwing his reins to a hostler, Judge Norwood descended from his carriage, followed by his guest.

A few minutes more established them at one of the small open-air tables.

White-aproned waiters were running busily to and fro, taking the orders of the numerous guests.

Ice-cream and lemonade were soon placed before the travelers.

"I presume the juice of the lemon is not the strongest beverage dispensed here," said the judge, with a smile. "But anything stronger is forbidden. It will not do for me to help them to break the laws."

"Hardly," answered Cop. "We will have to draw it mild."

The judge received nods from many passers. He had evidently an abundance of acquaintances among the carriage population.

One gentleman stopped, a tall, thin-featured, red-whiskered person, with something furtive and dubious about his eyes.

"How do you do, judge?" he asked. "I saw you drive up. Your new turn-out is a beauty."

"Glad to see you, Mr. Warren. Won't you join us? Do you know Mr. Colt?"

"I have not that honor."

"Let me introduce you. Mr. Colt, Mr. Warren. Please be seated."

"Mr. William Warren?" asked Cop, whose eyes had traced every lineament of the newcomer's face.

"The same. One of our most active merchants. Mr. Colt is—somewhat in my line of business."

The judge's indiscreet revelation had been checked in time by a warning movement of Cop's hand.

"I am very glad to know him," said Mr. Warren, as he helped himself to a seat.

Some time passed in general conversation.

"I have heard your name mentioned by a

friend," remarked Cop. "That is if you are the Water street grocer of that name."

"The same. Was it a mutual friend?"

"An acquaintance, I should say. One whom you have been kind enough to befriend under trying circumstances. Mr. Dorsey Hamilton, the discharged prisoner."

"Ah!" exclaimed the judge, with sudden interest.

The expression of the grocer's face on hearing these words was not lost on the quiet speaker. Evidently some uneasy consciousness had been aroused. But his voice, when he spoke, was soft and fluent.

"Yes, I knew him before his sentence. He was a splendid accountant, and I got him very reasonably. A business transaction, you know. Recent jail deliveries cannot expect the highest wages." He gave an unpleasant laugh.

"But are you not afraid to trust him? He tells me you have put him in a position of financial responsibility."

"He will not steal from me; he is just the man to trust. He will be on his good behavior. Understand me: I don't swallow his story of his innocence. Judge Norwood"—with a bow to the judge—"had the handling of him, and the judge has a keen eye for a rogue. But the fellow has a new record to make. I can trust him."

"Very shrewd of you, I must admit," answered Cop, with a show of admiration.

"I don't like this fellow," he said to himself. "He is not telling the truth; this is a cooked-up story. I catch the scent of a secret behind this neat yarn."

"Yours is an excellent theory," remarked the judge; "but it takes some courage to put it in practice. It may not work."

"If it doesn't there will be another job for you," rejoined Mr. Warren, with a loud laugh.

His laugh was echoed by the others. Cop acted as if he had heard a very neat joke.

"Welcome to Belmont, gentlemen," added the judge, as two new-comers nodded. "Will you take a seat with us? We can make room for you, I fancy. Do you know my friends, Messrs. Colt and Warren? Allow me to introduce Messrs. Flite and Osborn, of the firm of Markham & Co."

Mr. Colt bowed low.

"We are acquaintances already," remarked Mr. Warren.

He shook hands familiarly with Osborn; Flite took his hand also, but in a distasteful manner. There was a look on his face as if he had swallowed a sour grape.

Nothing escaped Colt's busy eyes. Although he seemed to be occupied in toying with his glass, yet there was not a look, a movement, an expression that he failed to note.

"A confoundedly neat bit of luck," he muttered to his glass. "Here are four of my men together, by a happy chance. I have made some discoveries, too; I hope to make more before we part."

A brisk conversation ensued. Cop took his full share in it. Fortunately, his profession was known only to the judge.

Yet he learned nothing more. Sharply as he watched his companions, keenly as he listened for peculiarities of tone, no trace of a secret understanding could be discovered. These parties were mere acquaintances, who had casually met.

He remarked one thing only. Mr. Flite continued distant toward Warren, while Osborn was free and familiar with him.

"There has been something between those two men," muttered Cop. "Flite either dislikes or despises Warren. He looks on him as an enemy or as a tool. Which?

To that there was no answer.

The party broke up after a few minutes more. They rose, still chatting. The judge and Mr. Flite talked on one side of the table. Warren and Osborn laughed over some jest on the other.

Cop stood for the moment disengaged, except for his eyes.

"It is the best thing out," laughed Osborn. "A word in your ear, Warren."

They whispered together for a few minutes, still laughing. But to the trained ear of the listener this laugh was not altogether natural. And there was more meaning than merriment in Warren's face when he caught a glimpse of it.

At the same moment Flite's eyes were fixed on Warren with a gaze so stern as to be threatening.

It was a complication out of which Cop could make nothing as yet.

But it was seed wheat to the wide-awake detective. It would grow and bear fruit in the fertile soil of his mind.

"Come, gentlemen. I am sorry to break up such a pleasant company. The shadows are lengthening. We must be away."

It was Osborn who spoke.

A shaking of hands followed, and the party separated.

Osborn and Flite sought their carriage. Warren strolled away to find a party of friends he had left. Cop and the judge sat for a few minutes more. Then they, too, sought their carriage, and drove spinning back toward the city.

It had been a fruitful evening for the detective.

That night he had a few more entries to make in his note-book.

He had grown certain of one thing. Dorsey Hamilton was right. There was a plot.

What was that plot, and who were the plotters? That was the next problem to be solved.

CHAPTER VIII. A PRECIOUS PAIR.

We must now request the company of our readers to a locality very different from that of our last chapter, and to society of a much lower grade in the social rank. This is to the interior of a tap-room in that unsavory region "down town" where congregate the disreputables of the good city of brotherly love. The room in question is a well-soiled and loud-smelling apartment, kept by a worthy German who thinks more of the sale of his beer than of the quality of his customers, and has always on hand a portly array of black bottles for the lovers of a heavier tap. Here and there are placed tables, for the use of those customers who wish to linger over their beer, but the main business of the saloon is done at the counter, in the traditional stand-up fashion of American drinkers.

Seated at one of the tables in this room were two persons, both of them apparently the worse for liquor, and of by no means reputable appearance. One of them we already know. It was Jake Jumper, the old tramp who had assisted Dorsey on his release from prison. The other was a much younger man; a well-built fellow, of a countenance that had once been good, but was now marked by many traces of dissipation. His dress was but little better than that of old Jake, and taken altogether he presented the aspect of a very hard case.

The worthy pair paid but little attention to the *habitus* of the saloon, who were coming and going at irregular intervals, and were by no means a savory set.

On the contrary, they hob-nobbed over their glasses like two boon companions, and seemed to care not a jot how the world wagged, if it only let them have their drunk in peace.

"Tell ye what, crony," cried old Jake, bringing his glass down heavily on the table, "that ain't bad sap. I allers like a snap ter my old rye, and that's what I call neat juice. It stirs up a man clean down ter the short ribs."

"Oh, dry up on that!" growled his companion. "Ought to taste the six-year-old down at Joe Plummer's. Wouldn't trade five fingers o' that for a bar'l o' this. Thought from the locks o' you that you knowed something about hard-tack."

He spoke with better enunciation than his companion, and seemed like one who was not always the dissolute character he now appeared.

"So I do, old boy. I've swallered it at headquarters, and I've foller'd it all th' way down to—hic! Landlord!—landlord, I say!" he fiercely cried.

"Ay, ay!" came from the bar.

"Ain't yer a bit hard o' hearin', old beer tub? Fill up these glasses with the same rye juice, and be spry, d'y'e hear?"

"You're a lively coon, Jake, if that's your name. Give us your hand. I sort o' freeze to you," said his companion.

The half-tipsy pair clasped hands, and looked eternal friendship.

"Jake's my handle, you bet. What's yours?"

"Jack. Call me Jack Clark, and I'm there. Here's to your health, Jake."

"Here's to ye, Jack."

They lifted the full glasses which had just been set before them, and drank deep draughts of boon companionship.

Setting down his half-emptied glass, Jake looked his companion full in the face.

"Jack Clark, hey? Seems ter me as I've heern that appellation somewhere afore. Ain't allers been a whisky swill, I calkerlate?"

"No," answered Clark, with a look of tipsy regret. "I was once a gentleman, old chap. I once made my living like an honest man, and didn't touch the rank poison that's made such a bloat of me now."

"Then ye're a blazin' fool," ejaculated Jake. "Ye wouldn't catch this coon tipplin', only as I've sampled whisky from the cradle up."

"Of course I'm a fool. I don't deny it," answered Clark, with a sigh, that was followed by a sip from his glass. "It's got hold o' me, and won't let go, Jake. The foul fiend take the man that made a drunkard of me, and that keeps me down in the slums."

"Aha!" answered Jake, with a hiccoughing laugh. "So it's there ye are, crony? Got a friend in th' saddle, hey? Hope he finds ye in cash. Takes the blunt to keep a coon in whisky and waffles nowadays, my jolly."

"I dunno as it's any o' your affairs how I get my cash," answered Clark, with a drunken wink. "I generally manage to keep flush, and I don't raise any blisters with the hammer."

"Anyhow here's to the man that taught ye the virtues of old Bourbon, and that keeps yer glass squared up ter the brim." Jake tossed off the remnant of his whisky, in which feit he was emulated by his companion.

"Here's to him! And may Old Nick choke him! That's my sentiment."

Jake sat gazing at his comrade for several minutes, with a look of tipsy wisdom. The other lay back in his chair, with sleepily blinking eyes. Suddenly the old fellow slapped his knee, with a loud laugh.

"Thunder and blitzen, I've got it now!" he ejaculated. "Jack Clark! Got you down fine, youngster. Why, shoot it, ye're first cousin to one o' my special friends. Blazes, we've got to licker on that. Landlord!—landlord, I say. Fill up them there flowing bowls, and be lively 'bout it."

"Dunno who you mean," said Clark, sleepily.

"Why, Dorsey Hamilton. You know him, I reckon."

"What the deuce do you know about him?" queried Clark, suddenly wide awake.

"Hang it, Jack, him and me was in Moya together. Summat over five years back, I reckon. That was 'fore he got toddled up to the Hill. You know all 'bout it; how he played first fiddle with a safe key, and got railroaded."

"Guess so," said Clark, with a nod.

"You oughter," broke out old Jake, with a very knowing laugh.

"Don't see as I oughter," answered Clark. "Twixt you and me I don't b'lieve that Dorsey ever done it. We were like brothers once, and I bet he's as honest at heart as a trade dollar. Poor Dorsey, he went to jail and I went to the bad. Let's drink his health."

"Glad ye've got sich a good 'pinion of him," said Jake, just touching the glass to his lips. "It's more nor he's got of you."

"Why blast his optics, he don't venture to say nothing against me!" cried Clark, bringing down his glass with an oath.

"It was all in confidence," returned Jake, leaning back, and closing his lips resolutely.

"I don't care a fig," exclaimed Clark fiercely. "Out with it now, or I'll choke it out o' you, you dead beat."

"Don't see no use makin' a cradle outer a cat's hide," retorted Jake. "He said as how somebody must ha' went back on him, and sold him out. And he had a powerful notion as that somebody were his cousin, Jack Clark."

"He lies, blast him!" cried Clark fiercely. "He was always a set up chap, anyhow, that wanted to put on airs over his betters. But, by the jolly crook, he sha'n't lay his lies on this chicken! I never done a bit o' treachery in my life, and I'll lay him out for this as soon as he gets out o' the stone jug, blame my eyes if I don't!"

"Calkerlate ye kin have yer chance any time ye're handy," answered Jake with a grin. "He's out now, and at yer service."

"That's a blasted lie!" roared Jack, growing a shade pale. "He's got a year to run yet."

"He's out, anyhow. Good b'havior and a clean record counts, you know, on the Hill."

Jack Clark looked uneasy. He stirred restlessly under the keen and sarcastic eyes of the old tramp. He snatched up his glass and swallowed the rest of the contents.

"If he's out I'll salt his ugly hide. I never done Dorsey Hamilton an ill turn in my life, and I won't have him swinging his lies about me."

Their conversation was interrupted at this point by the voice of a person who had just entered the saloon, and was asking a question of the landlord in a loud, stern voice.

"My good fellow, I am looking for a man of the name of John Clark. He is one of your customers, I believe."

"I dinks so," grinned the worthy German. "Do I know Shon Clark? Vell, I reckons. An'dere's de man hisself; behint yours back."

The questioner turned sharply round. He was a gentlemanly-dressed personage, tall and thin, with a dark, stern face. His expression was sour and morose, as of one who took the world at wrong ends.

Old Jake gave a slight start on observing him, which he endeavored to conceal by fiercely rubbing his nose. He paid no further attention to the stranger, however, but fixed his eyes on his companion with a questioning look. The old fellow was evidently not so drunk as he pretended.

But Clark gave no sign of knowing the speaker. He gazed at him with a show of drunken astonishment.

"Dunno as I've done nothin'," he muttered. "Where's yer star?"

"Are you John Clark?" asked the stern stranger.

"Used to be. Nowadays they call me 'that bloat, John Clark.'"

"Then I would like a few private words with you."

"And you ain't on the police, nor nothin'?"

"No, no," impatiently.

"Then I'm yer cove. Sail over here. Guess we can find a quiet corner."

He rose and went staggering across the room, to a table that occupied its remotest corner. He was joined here by the stranger, after the latter had first ordered some liquor from the bar.

A conversation followed in a low tone, too subdued for a word to reach the ears of the other inmates of the saloon.

Old Jake lay back in his chair, with eyes half-closed, and his fingers toying carelessly with his

empty glass. To all appearance he was thinking of his castles in Spain. Yet any one who had observed the nervous fluttering of his nostrils, and the quick coming and going of his breath, would have seen that he was keenly on the alert.

In fact there was not a movement of the couple in the corner that escaped his attention, nor an audible word that was not caught by his quick ears. Yet nothing definite could be heard, and there were no gestures from which any meaning could be taken.

After fifteen minutes of this silent and useless vigilance old Jake rose, lazily stretched himself, and strode over to the bar, along which he edged until nearer the speakers.

"Meet me then, Thursday at eight, at the place mentioned. Bring what points you can pick up," said the stranger.

"You bet I'll be there," answered Clark.

The stranger rose. His hand for a moment met that of Clark, and seemed to leave something there.

"Remember. And be cautious," he said.

As he turned to go he came face to face with old Jake, who was lounging limply against the bar. A sharp glance shot from the stern eyes of the gentleman, but he only caught Jake in a drunken yawn. With a look of disgust he left the saloon.

He had no sooner disappeared than the old tramp straightened himself up, and lounged across the room toward the table where Clark was just then engaged in emptying his glass.

"Reckon as how you run afoul of an angel," he said, with a drunken hiccough, as he dropped into a seat.

Clark looked guiltily up, and then laughed and tapped his pocket with a meaning air.

"What'll you have, old chap? Guess it's my —hic—my treat. What'll y'a've?"

Jake surveyed him keenly.

"See yere, Jack, don't ye want a pard in that game?"

"Nary time. Mum's the word."

"Don't s'pose I'd blab, do ye? Come, old coon, fork out."

"You git," cried Clark. "Can't pump this chicken."

"Tain't nothin' 'bout Dorsey?"

A meaning laugh came from Clark's drunken lips.

"Lied on me, blast him for a beat! Dorsey Hamilton's kicked up the wrong coon. I'm goin' to git even—I'm goin' to git—" His head swayed from side to side, and then sunk on the table, in the limpness of sleep.

Old Jake rose with a look of baffled disgust. He paid his score at the bar and left the saloon, with a dissatisfied air. On reaching the outside, however, he quickly sought the window, and gazed, as well as he could, through its smeared panes.

He could just make out Clark's form. After a minute he saw him raise his head, look round the room, and then rise and make his way to the bar.

"Thought so," muttered the spy. "He got sleepy drunk too sudden. Didn't want to be pumped. But I fancy I've got some grist for Cop Colt's mill. He laughed knowingly. "It's lucky I've got a hard head, for I've swallowed enough whisky to floor a dozen goslings."

He walked on, as upright and soberly as if he had never touched a glass in his life. He continued his reflections as he went.

"The game is deepening," he said. "Joe Flite is not holding an interview with John Clark, and giving him money, without an object. And the fool as good as let out that he has been under pay these five years, and that by the man who made a drunkard of him. It's lucky I know the phiz of our sharp broker. I tell you what, Dorsey Hamilton, there's sunlight ahead for you. Your enemies are beginning to show their hands."

CHAPTER IX.

LOOSE ENDS OF EVIDENCE.

The office of the noted detective has changed but little since we were last there. Papers are strewn on the table and floor, and several unopened letters lie on the clear space before his chair. On them, as a paper weight, lies his well-browned meerschaum.

The sunlight streams through the west window into the empty room, and lays its clear line of light across the floor and well up on the wall. Like the detective himself, its mission seems to be to throw light in dark places, and reveal the secrets hidden in deep shadow from the eyes of men.

The door opens and the detective strides lazily in. He flings his hat on the table, stretches himself for a moment, and takes up his pipe.

"Some letters, eh? More business, I suppose. There's no rest for the wicked in this world;—and mighty little in the next, according to the best authorities."

Flinging himself easily in his chair, he took out his pen-knife and cut open the envelopes. Taking up one letter at random he glanced at the signature, and began to read:

"Another spoke in that Delaware case," he muttered.

At this moment the door again opened, and another person entered.

The sound made was very slight, but nothing escaped Cop's quick senses.

"Who is there?" he asked, running his eye rapidly down the letter.

"It is only me. Bilkins."

"Oh! I wanted to see you. Come up and show your countenance."

The visitor advanced, and displayed the face of the young man with whom old Benson had communicated in the Continental, and who had shadowed the shadow of the counterfeit Californian.

"Let's have your report, Bilkins. Tracked your bird to his nest, eh? I don't fancy he got away from your eyes."

Cop continued to read his letters as he spoke.

"Run him down," answered Bilkins, with an air of triumph. "He's a Pinkerton. We knew, of course, he wasn't a regular. Lives out Cherry street. A nice young man, and not bad at his trade, but you bet he didn't twig me."

"Ah! But this is all barley brew. Have you nothing stronger in your cask?"

He dropped the letter he had been reading, and took up another.

"Oh, yes; I wouldn't have come here with a lame duck like that. My gentleman reported this morning."

"He did, eh?" Cop showed more interest.

"To whom?"

"To one of the firm of Markham & Co., brokers. I didn't get the name. They met on the street, and I only learned he was one of the firm."

"Describe him."

"He was a tall, slim man; thin-faced, dark whiskers, set lips. Looks as if he could crack walnuts with his teeth."

"Eh?" Cop dropped his letter, and looked around at his agent. "I fancy you have hooked the right fish, Bilkins. That gentleman's name is Mr. Joseph Flite. Keep an eye on him; he is your game. I tell you, my lad, our grapes are ripening."

"I tried to make out what passed between them, but could not manage it," answered the young spy, with a look of great gratification.

"They are too wide awake for that," rejoined Cop, taking up the last of his letters. "Watch the pair of them, Bilkins. That will answer, my lively youth."

The spy edged, with a smile of satisfaction, toward the door. Ere he reached it, however, he was stopped by a call from the detective.

"Come back here," he cried, in an altered tone; "wait one minute."

It was the letter he was reading that caused this change of manner. He ran his eye hastily down the sheet, which was written in a large and somewhat sprawling hand.

"See here, young man; do you think you could recognize this face in a crowd?"

He unlocked the table drawer, and took from it the photograph of a fair-faced and rather good-looking young woman.

"There, study that."

He handed Bilkins the portrait, and returned to his letter, which he again carefully perused. Then he rose and walked across the room to a railroad map, which hung against the wall.

Tracing a route with his finger, he muttered to himself:

"Via New York. There's no other way. Most likely the through Express from Boston."

"Got it in," said Bilkins, tendering back the photograph.

"Put it in your pocket; it may help your memory. Hurry out to the Pennsylvania Railroad station. Watch every New York Express train that comes in for the next twenty-four hours. That young lady will be one of them. If you twig her, don't lose sight of her. Find out where she goes, and report to me immediately."

"How about Mr. Flite and the Pinkerton chap?"

"Never mind them. This is more important. I will see that Flite is looked after. Now slide. Study the time-table, and don't let a train escape you."

"Ay, ay!" answered Bilkins, with a keen look in his gray eyes.

He was out of the door in a second, and off like a deer on his errand of trust.

"That's a sharp young rogue," soliloquized Cop, looking after him. "I haven't a better scout. There may be nothing in this, but it won't do to let any door close on us. Let me see if a trifle of smoke will clear my brain."

He took up his meerschaum, filled and lighted it. Leaning back in his chair, he drew several long puffs on his pipe. Then taking up again the letter which had so interested him, he read it with great care and attention.

"There may be something in it, and there may not," he said, throwing it down. "I am inclined to think there is. There's the very dence of a net woven around Dorsey Hamilton. But if I get fairly hold of the right end of the thread, I promise to unravel the whole thing. It looks more and more as if Joe Flite is the man. But there's nothing sure in this uncertain world."

He smoked away as if he had cast all cares

from his mind, and had no interest in the world except to empty his pipe.

"Let me see," he muttered, after five minutes of silence. "There are three members of the firm—Markham, Osborn and Flite. Not a shadow against the first two; all the shadows against Flite. In the first place, he and Dorsey are in love with the same woman. He gets jilted. Immediately afterward this job is put up on Dorsey, and Flite chases him like a sleuth-hound till he lands him in prison. So far, good."

He ran his fingers thoughtfully through his hair.

"Now what comes next? The key word to unlock the safe was given Dorsey by Markham in his own house. Present there, Mrs. Hamilton, John Clark, Alice Johnson and a kitchen-girl. Which of them listened and reported the word? Let me see. The kitchen-girl slides off to some other kitchen. Miss Johnson remains in the house for three years, and then goes to her friends in the East. John Clark sinks into dissipation, and is kept supplied with money and led into drinking by some person unknown. Finally he is seen in private conference with Joe Flite. Money passes between them, and an appointment for a new meeting is made."

He drew silently on his pipe for several minutes, lost in thought.

"It looks seriously as if Clark was the man, and as if Flite was trying to kill him with rum, and so get rid of him. This new appointment has something to do with Dorsey Hamilton. Perhaps a plot is hatching to return him to prison. It was Flite put the spy on old Job Benson. Said spy has reported Job's movements. Does the rascal suspect that the old miner is a wolf in sheep's clothing? I fancied I played the returned Californian pretty well, but I have a sharper to deal with."

He laid down his pipe, got up, and strode around the room, humming an air to himself as he did so.

"There are two other points to clear up," he muttered. "First, who bought Judge Norwood's new team? Second, who does William Warren belong to? He did not put a thief at his cash book without an object. Who is he working for? Osborn talks pleasantly with the grocer. Flite meets him with a frowning face. Was that assumed, to hide a secret understanding? I am inclined to think so. Flite is our man, for a jug of punch! But it will take something more than shadows to prove it. I must get hold of some solid evidence."

He turned to the table, put on his hat, slipped into his pocket the letter in which he had been so interested, and walked to the door, as if with intent to leave the room. Ere he had reached it, however, the door again opened, and another person appeared in the doorway.

The detective cast a quick glance at this portly, red-faced, dignified individual, who had the look of a gentleman's butler.

"Ah, Mr. Melton," he said. "Glad to see you. Take a seat."

The visitor did so, puffing as if with exertion in climbing the stairs to Cop's office. He fanned his face for a moment with his hat, looking very important. Cop cast himself into another chair, and remained silent. He apparently thought it best not to press this dignitary.

"I am here to give you the information desired," said the visitor at length, in a strong English accent. "And in the interests of justice—"

"Just so," nodded the detective.

"I am here in the interests of justice," continued the visitor, with pompous dignity.

"Mr. Flite has not treated you too well?" asked Cop, in a careless tone.

"He discharged me, sir. After years of faithful service. He turned me adrift after I had put up with hoceans of injustice. And for a mere trifl o' six shillin', thruppence ha' penny has I knew no more of than the child hunborn. But I forgive 'im, sir. I bear 'im no malice whatsoever." He was highly impressive in his declaration of disinterestedness.

"That is the right principle," cried Cop. "I honor your sentiment. You lived with Mr. Flite at the time of his marriage, I believe. Let me see. That was in February, 1872."

"You 'ave the correck date," answered the dignified butler. "Mr. Flite was married hon the first o' February, of said year."

"He went on a wedding trip?"

"A short one, sir, has we all remarked. Hon the ninth 'e returned to 'is domestic roof, and to the halmighty dollar which—but let me say nothing derogatory to a gentleman whose injustice I 'ave forgiven."

"Did he spend his evenings and nights home from that date?" asked Cop shortly. He was getting tired of the long-winded pomposity of his visitor.

"E did, sir, till the evening of the eleventh. We remarked it hinvoluntary, sir. A gentleman but two days 'ome with a sweet young wife to habson' himself for the 'ole hevening. As was remarked on hamong us, it was 'artless. I repeat it, sir, it was 'artless."

"Ah," cried Cop with interest. "On the evening of the eleventh of February, 1872, Mr. Flite absented himself from his home. Is that what I understand you to say?"

"It is what I mean. I can't be responsible for what you understand. On that hevening 'e did not come out from the city till the midnight train, though previously 'e 'ad been accustomed to be 'ome to a hearty supper. Poor Mrs. Flite was halmost distracted by 'is hab-sence. And 'e spoke very 'arsh to her, sir. Cruelly 'arsh. I 'eard it hinvoluntary. I 'ap-pened to be within 'earing, sir."

"I see," answered Cop, with a sm'le. "What other servants were in the house at the time?"

"There was 'Enry Jones, the coachman, Sarah Jenkins, the hup-stairs girl, Mrs. Donovan, the ousekeeper, and Bridget Flanagan, the cook."

"Bridget Flanagan?" repeated Cop, with a slight start.

"Hexcuse me. She come hafterward, has I now remember."

"Well, well, that does not matter, Mr. Melton. I am under great obligations to you, in the interests of justice."

"No hobligation, sir. No hobligation what-ever," declared the butler impressively. "In the hinterests of justice my private feelings must stand haside."

"It is only a little matter of a suit on a note. I think we will beat Mr. Flite."

"I 'ope you may," cried Mr. Melton eagerly. "Not as I bear 'im any malice. But I 'aven't forgotten that houtrageous row habout a miserable six shilling, thruppence ha'penny. I despise 'im, sir. And I despise 'is hallegations. I've 'ad better situations than 'is miserly place, thank 'eaven."

"Here is a trifle to pay for your loss of time," said Cop, anxious to cut short his long-winded visitor. "If I should need you again—"

"I'm halways at your service. Halways."

The officer was leading the way to the door and hustled his visitor out of the room with no great ceremony. He had pumped all he wanted out of him for the time being, and did not care to be drowned in a dry well. But he had some trouble to cast off his officious witness, and it was full ten minutes before he found himself alone in the street, and Mr. Melton walking away with very stiff-backed dignity in another direction.

"Deuce take the jackass, he sticks worse than a chestnut burr," growled Cop. "He may be a useful witness, though. So Flite did not return home until midnight on the night of the robbery; and with a new married wife to worry about him. It is worth being talked to death to find that out. It is a strong nail in my gentleman's coffin. But there is another point of importance. Bridget Flanagan takes service with Mr. Flite immediately after she leaves Mr. Hamilton. Why? Did she know something that it was necessary to hush up? I had left that young lady out of my books. It wasn't wise. An interview with her may be refreshing. So Mr. Joseph Flite has in his pay and under his eye two of the inmates of Mrs. Hamilton's on the occasion of the robbery. The net is closing.—As for this letter, I hardly expect it will lead to anything. It is but natural that the young lady should tire of the country. Yet that correspondence might be of interest."

He took the letter from his pocket and ran his eye over it again. He was now in a little-frequented street. A few persons were passing, but to these the detective gave no attention.

Yet one of them gave him a look of earnest recognition.

"Mr. Colt," he said, stopping short. "I am glad to have met you."

"Mr. Hamilton," returned the officer. "Just the man I was thinking of."

He held out his hand, and took Dorsey's in a firm grasp, drawing him aside from the passage-way.

"Have you learned anything?" asked Dorsey, fixing his eyes on the face of the detective with a look of pleading inquiry.

"Lots," was the sententious answer. "Listen."

He shortly ran over the work that had been done since his last interview with his client.

"This is under promise of the strictest secrecy," he impressively remarked. "Don't breathe it even to your mother. But it is my positive opinion that Joseph Flite is the man to whom you owe your false imprisonment. As for his motive I am not sure but that it was the revenge of jealousy. Miss Amberly may have viewed you with more favorable eyes than you, in your modesty, imagined."

"No, no!" muttered Dorsey, shaking his head sadly. "She did not even dream that I had dared lift my thoughts to her."

"I have already told you that you were love-blind. Don't make me repeat it. Your rival may have seen the hole in the ladder which was closed to you. You must manage an interview with her.—Don't shake your head so mournfully.—You must, I say. I will arrange time, place and manner. Hang it, man, you are not afraid of the woman, are you?"

"Yes," answered Dorsey, hanging his head. "I would not dare face her after my disgrace. She must despise and scorn me."

"Now is just the time for her to show her real feelings. Mark me, I am seeking for motives. There may be another. I have learned that at the time of the robbery Flite and Osborn

were both engaged in speculations. Flite was unfortunate in his. Osborn was very lucky in his. He laid then the foundations of his large fortune. Very well, an unlucky speculation is a deep rat-hole. Fifty thousand dollars would be a neat pill for a man with margins to make good. And another turn of the wheel would sweep the fifty thousand away like chaff. Flite got pinched just then in a wheat corner. Here is another strong motive, my lad."

"My God! Could he have sent me to the penitentiary for such a pitiful reason as that?"

"Pitiful reason? It is the strongest of reasons to a speculator. They make nothing of robbing a bank and destroying the honest record of a lifetime in the same cause. Joseph Flite is of that sort. He is a man without a heart, as you well know. But he has a head, and a very shrewd one."

Dorsey stood lost in deep thought for several minutes. The detective kept his sharp eyes fixed on the working countenance before him, with a smile that was half triumph and half pity.

"It may be so. It may be so," he said at length. "He certainly pursued me bitterly. This is a far more probable motive than the other. That I can never accept."

"My dear sir, remember that the improbable is our stock in trade."

Dorsey shook his head incredulously.

"By the way," he said, with sudden recollection, "I have something for your ear. I met, not an hour ago, my mother's friend, Alice Johnson."

"The deuce you did!" cried Cop, with a sharp start.

"Yes. She was in traveling-dress, and had seemingly just come to the city."

"Ha! Then Bilkins is likely to have his labor for his pains. We were too late. Did you speak to her?"

"No, I saw her from a distance, and was too busily engaged to accost her."

"Then you did not find where she went?"

"Why, no. Do you think that was necessary?"

"I certainly do. Read this letter."

He thrust into Dorsey's hand the letter which he had continued to hold throughout this conversation.

Dorsey read it, with a little surprise.

"This is from Mr. Cornwall, the friend with whom Alice was staying at Clifton. I saw you been writing to him for information?"

"Yes."

"Was that necessary?"

"It was desirable, at any rate. Do you see what he says?"

"Yes, that she was in correspondence with some Philadelphia friend, that letters ceased to come, and that she seemed worried, and shortly afterward insisted on returning to the city. I can see that Mr. Cornwall was not pleased with her resolution. But there does not seem to be anything in this. Her worry may have been but weariness of the country. It may have had nothing to do with the correspondence of which you make so much."

"There are plenty of ways, my dear sir," smiled Cop. "But for all that I would give something to know who was her correspondent. And I think I shall question Mr. Cornwall on that point. And now, it is important—that is, it may be important—for me to know just where Miss Johnson is domiciled. I have a sharp scout at the railroad depot waiting for her now. Let me know just where you saw her, and in what direction she was going. She had probably just left the street car, and had not far to walk."

Dorsey gave, in a few words, the desired information. After a minute or two more the detective and his client separated. An hour afterward the young man called Bilkins was on the spot described by Dorsey Hamilton, with both his eyes very wide open.

CHAPTER X.

AN ACCIDENT, AND ITS CONSEQUENCE.
DORSEY HAMILTON was a very different looking personage from the pallid and dejected prisoner whom we saw, a month before, emerging from the gates of the stony battlemented Eastern Penitentiary. He had now regained his color, he was dressed with taste and neatness, and he walked with a more decided and manly tread than he had then displayed. And yet his head was bent, and some marks of the old dejection clung to him still. The shadow of disgrace hung over him, and he involuntarily shrunk from the eyes of passers, with a lingering idea that they might recognize and point him out with the finger of scorn.

He was now wandering along one of the winding walks of Fairmount Park. He was "off duty" to-day, and had walked out here partly to get out of the reach of human eyes. In the bustle of business this did not so much disturb him. People then were too busy with their own affairs to trouble themselves about those of others. But the lounging pleasure-seekers he met out here had full leisure to use their eyes in other folks' business, and Dorsey sought the most unfrequented paths, with a desire to escape from curious observation.

He was full of thoughts of his case, and not without hope that the shrewd detective would yet succeed in establishing his innocence, though he could not but feel that it would prove a difficult task. But what mainly troubled the solitary man was Cop's desire that he should call on Clare Amberly. He shrank from the very thought of this with a deep dread. To have her clear eyes fixed on him with scorn and contempt! He feared it worse than he feared death. He could bear the hatred of the world, but he could not bear her disdain. And he silently made up his mind that he would never consent to the detective's scheme in this particular.

"A scornful look from her would kill me," he said to himself. "For five long years I have brooded on her dear image. I remember only kind looks from her sweet eyes. Let me not destroy that memory by meeting those eyes fixed on me with sorrowful and shrinking contempt. Better never see her again than see myself the object of her aversion."

The approach of a noisy party on the path which he was traversing caused him to turn aside toward the carriage drive that ran near. His way led over a swell of land on the edge of a ravine. Just before him was a great tree, and beyond it a thick growth of flower bushes.

He had passed the tree and was near the edge of the group of bushes when he caught sight of a woman's dress. Through the leafy screen he could gain but the vaguest outline of the approaching form, yet something in it gave him an involuntary start, and a hasty impulse to turn and fly.

He could scarcely have told himself why, yet his heart was throbbing, and his face flashing and paling, as the woman turned the corner of the copse, and came into full view on the open sward.

Dorsey stood as if rooted to the spot, all his life concentrated in his eyes. He needed no second glance to recognize that stately figure, and clear-cut face. It was Clare Amberly. The meeting so dreaded had been brought about by sheer accident.

She moved on, apparently lost in a reverie, and not noticing the silent figure which stood there with such wistful yet fearful gaze.

Something, possibly a magnetic appeal, caused her to turn, and lift her quiet eyes to his bloodless face.

There followed a violent start, a shudder that shook her frame from head to foot, a suppressed cry.

"Dorsey Hamilton!"

These words came in shuddering accents from her lips. She grew deadly pale, and swayed as if she was about to fall.

Dorsey broke from his motionless attitude, and stepped forward, with the impulse to support her. But she suddenly grew rigidly erect, and waved him back with what seemed to him a movement of horror and disdain.

"Miss Amberly!" he cried in earnest and pleading accents. "Do you too condemn me unheard?"

She appeared about to reply. But she checked herself. Her lip took on its proudest curve. Her eyes wore a strange look.

"It is too late," she murmured, in a low, wavering tone.

The next moment she had turned, and was walking away with a step which she seemed vainly endeavoring to make firm and steady. This unexpected meeting seemed to have shaken the proud beauty to her soul.

Dorsey stood looking after her with mingled feelings. At first there had risen in his mind the glad hope that he was not quite indifferent to the woman whom he so ardently loved. But this was followed by a feeling of crushing despair as she turned away with that sternly upbraiding look.

He staggered away from the spot of that fatal meeting, with his head on his breast, his soul too depressed to heed aught but his dark thoughts.

Not knowing or caring where he went he wandered on to the carriage track, that ran close by. A two-horse team was dashing on at a brisk trot. Heedless of its approach he stepped in front of the horses. It was too late to check their speed or turn them aside.

A cry from the gentleman driver failed to reach his distracted senses. There came a second cry, almost a scream, in a woman's voice, that penetrated his ears like a rifle-shot.

He knew the voice. It was that of Clare Amberly. He looked hastily up. The dashing horses were almost upon him. He gave a quick start backward, but it was too late to avoid collision. The swelling counter of the nearest horse struck him violently on the shoulder, and dashed him backward with such force that he fell senseless by the roadside, like a tree that has been felled by the woodman's ax.

The gentleman in the carriage pulled hard on his horses. But he saw a woman running hastily toward the fallen man, and dread of possible serious consequences made him loosen his reins and drive hotly on, with a heartless thought of his own interests alone.

Only one person had observed this accident. It was before the driving season, and no other

carriage was visible on the road. It was Clare who had turned at the cry of the gentleman in the carriage, had observed Dorsey's imminent danger, and had given vent to that wild cry of warning. It was Clare now that ran impulsively forward, and bent over his prostrate and motionless form.

"Dorsey! Dorsey!" she cried, wildly. "Tell me—oh, tell me, that I have not driven you to death by my cruel scorn! I love you! In spite of all that has passed I love you! Oh, come back to life and me!"

She caught his hands, and pressed and chafed them between her own. She passed her soft palm over his pallid and deathlike face. She kneeled and pressed her lips to his brow.

"Why, why have I been so cold and distant?" she cried, in a voice of agony. "He loved me years ago. I knew it, though I would not recognize it by word or look. Was it I drove him to that dreadful crime, as I have now driven him to death? I that have refused a dozen offers of marriage for his sake! I fear so! I fear so!"

There passed a slight shudder over the frame of the prostrate man. She noticed it and drew slightly back, though she still clasped his hand without knowing what she did.

The next moment he stirred uneasily, and opened his eyes. A look of joy came into them as he caught sight of that excited and lovely face so near his own, and felt the warm pressure of her soft hand.

"Clare! Dear Clare!" he murmured, almost inaudibly. "Then I did not dream! I felt your presence through every fiber of my being. Yet I could not move or speak. I love you so. I have loved you so long and so hopelessly. Say that it is not utterly in vain."

Clare's face flushed deeply at these words. Her lips opened tremblingly. She seemed on the point of speaking, but no words came. Yet he felt his hand faintly pressed. Unknowingly to herself she had given this answer of her heart to his pleading words.

Yet her voice, when she at length schooled herself to speak, was steady and quiet.

"Do you feel better, Mr. Hamilton?" she asked. "I feared you were killed by that dreadful blow. Are you better? Can you not rise? Oh! say that you are not seriously hurt!"

The thrilling anxiety of her last words gave new hope to his heart. He raised himself from his prostrate attitude, and looked eagerly into her speaking eyes, as she still knelt beside him.

"No, no! I am not hurt. I was only stunned by the shock. But say at least that you do not despise me, say that you do not utterly scorn me. I dared to love you in the old days, now so many dreadful years gone by. I could not help it, though you gave my love no return though you were always so kind but so indifferent."

A revulsion shook the kneeling woman's frame.

"You were blind," she murmured involuntarily. "If you had spoken then—But it is too late. It is too late. Why, oh why did you commit that dreadful crime? Say not that I had anything to do with it! Not any feelings or hopes in which I had a share drove you to it!"

He drew back with an impulse of indignation, and rose to his feet, drawing his form proudly up.

"Then you too believe me guilty? You share in the general abhorrence of my alleged crime? I had hoped, at least, to be spared this!"

She rose too, and stood before him pliant and bending, her late haughty bearing utterly overcome by the emotion through which she had passed, and by the effect on her of the declaration of love to which she had just listened.

"You were condemned. You have suffered the penalty of crime," she faltered.

"I am not the first innocent man that has been condemned, and that has suffered for the crime of another," he firmly replied. "I am innocent, Clare Amberly, I am innocent of that crime as yourself."

"Heaven grant that it may be so," she earnestly replied. "But the proof was terribly direct. Yet I never fully believed in your guilt. And of late years I have grown to seriously doubt it. I said as much to Mr. Osborn, not a month ago. But if not you, who? Some one took that missing money."

"That is what remains to be proved," he quietly replied. "I have not been at rest since I left that dreadful prison, Miss Amberly. Some secret enemy sent me there. Who he was I am determined to discover. I have the best detective in the city in search of the real criminal. Already many mysterious points of evidence have been made clear. I will discover him yet. And my innocence shall be established in the sight of Heaven and man. If to convince you alone, I will devote my life to the quest."

"If you can but prove it!" she cried, with a hasty impulse. "If you can but prove it, I will—"

"What?" he asked, bending forward, his face eager with hope.

But she had checked her impulse, and repress-

ed the involuntary cry of her heart. She drew herself up into an erect and quiet attitude, though her eyes were yet full of an earnest light.

"I am too hasty," she declared. "Yet prove it—for my sake, prove it. I believe in your innocence now; but the world must believe in it."

"The world shall. And you, who are all the world to me—you have surprised me to-day in saying that which I deemed forever buried in my heart. I have spoken; it is too late to take back a word. But tell me"—his lips quivered with emotion, as his frame bent toward her—"if I succeed in unmasking my secret foe—if I prove to the world and you that I have been fully dealt with, and have suffered for the crime of another—may I then hope? May the fond dream of love in which I have so wildly indulged, and which remained with me through all the hopeless days and hours of prison-life, cease to be hopeless? You have given me reason to believe that it was not quite idle and vain. Shall I not look ardently forward to—"

"Prove your innocence," she quietly answered, extending him her hand. "I will wait—and hope."

With a quick movement, he raised the hand he held to his lips, while his eyes beamed with joy.

"You have given me new life!" he cried. "I care not now for the disdain of all the world. Fear not that I shall fail. The prize of success is too precious. But we had best not be seen together. I am not yet a fit associate for you; the time may come. Until then, adieu."

He was rushing hastily away, when his name, uttered in her soft voice, recalled him.

"One word more," she said, eagerly. "You suspect some one. Who is it? Tell me. I may be able to help you in your search."

He was on the point of replying, but checked himself with an impulse of prudence.

"Not yet," he answered. "It will not do to accuse any man until our evidence grows stronger. Wait, at least, until I have consulted with the detective; I have promised to take no action without his advice. You shall hear from me—by letter. Not till my innocence is established will I intrude myself on you again in person."

He turned again and hastened away, as if afraid to trust himself any longer in her presence.

She stood, following him with her eyes, and with an expression on her face that would have given him new courage to see.

"It has been a wonderful hour," she murmured. "To think what it has brought forth. I never dreamed that that long-hidden secret could be surprised from my lips. I knew that he loved me. It is but meet that he should know that I loved him in return. Do I love him still? I thought that old feeling was dead. Yet my heart tells me that it yet lives, and has been awakened to new vitality by that startling accident. I did not know myself. I have been taught a new lesson of life."

She laughed softly. Her face was very pensive as she walked away. There was none of that stateliness of step and proud decision of countenance with which she had approached that spot. Love had wrought its usual miracle.

CHAPTER XI.

LAYING OUT THE NET.

WE must return to the office of the detective. Cop Colt was just then one of the busiest men in the good city of Philadelphia. He had at least a half-dozen important cases on hand, and had his lines reaching out in every direction, from his central station into the heart of the world of chicanery and crime. He was like a spider who sits in a close covert in his web, unseen by the buzzing flies, yet with his feet on the lines that run out to every part of his web, and quick to feel the least touch given to the delicate threads. To all appearance he sits quiet and heedless in his den, yet it needs but a touch to rouse him to active life, ready to pounce on his entrapped victim.

Perhaps Cop may relish this comparison, yet of all the animals in the known world the habits of the spider are most like those of a detective. Of the various cases held by the thief-taker that of Dorsey Hamilton most interested him. It was the most mysterious and best concealed and mystery was to him the very spice of life. He had already a dozen threads out, and began to think that he felt the fly in the web.

Yet he was by no means sure. There are so many unexpected turns in the annals of crime. It was necessary to gather yet further links of evidence against Joseph Flite ere the shrewd detective could venture to show his hand.

With this feeling in view he welcomed his young spy, Bilkins, as the latter entered his office with a look of anything but satisfaction.

Colt cast one quick glance on the young man's face.

"Failed, eh, Bilkins?" he queried. "So the young lady has been too much for you, my boy?"

"I have done my best, sir," answered Bilkins dejectedly. "If she is there she is in close hiding. I have kept a hawk's eye on the spot these

two days, but the original of that portrait has not stepped on the street."

"Are you sure of that? She might have gone to a point squares away from where Mr. Hamilton saw her."

"No," answered Bilkins decidedly. "Excuse me, but she did not go two squares away."

"Ah! Sure of that? Come, let me hear your reasons. How can you tell how far she went?"

Cop threw himself into a chair, and pointed another out to Bilkins. There was a look of kindly curiosity on his face.

"It is all a little calculation of mine," answered the young scout. "I worked it out this way. The lady had made a long journey, and would be too tired to care to walk far. Besides she had a heavy satchel in her hand. So you told me, at least. And she could hardly expect a spy on her track."

"I see. Go on," nodded Cop.

"In the second place she formerly lived in Philadelphia, as you said. Therefore she knew all about the street cars, and the best line to take to save her a long walk. Very well. She was seen on Girard avenue, between Sixth and Seventh streets, going east. Therefore she must have come to the avenue by the Eighth street cars. Her destination must have been somewhere between Sixth and Seventh. If it had been west of Sixth she would have come by the Fifth street cars. So I have her nailed within a single square."

"Not badly argued," said Cop, encouragingly.

"What then?"

"She may have turned into the street that crosses Girard avenue at that point. But she could not have gone far into it, either north or south, or she would have left the cars at Thompson or Poplar, or whatever street was nearest to her destination. So you see," he continued confidently, "I fancy I have nailed her within a very narrow space, and one that it was not hard to watch. It would have saved trouble, though, if Mr. Hamilton had been smart enough to track her to her hiding-place."

"It isn't everybody that has the detective instinct," answered Cop, with a smile. "You argue very well, Bilkins. Very well indeed. I think it is quite likely you are right. But I am not sure of that," he added reflectively.

"Why?" asked Bilkins quickly, with a look of disappointment.

"Simply because you have not seen her. That looks as if she was in hiding, and did not care to appear on the street. I hope she is. If she is hiding, then she has something to hide for, and I have an object in watching her. But then, my lad, in that case your theory falls to the ground. She might have played her game to throw any possible spy off the track, and may have left the car at that point as a blind."

"Then you think she went further?" asked Bilkins eagerly. "I have been watching an empty fox-hole?"

"It is possible, at least," answered Cop. "I should advise you to extend your excursion. Take Tom with you. It is a little too much ground for one pair of eyes to cover. And hark you. Keep a sharp lookout for Flite or his spy, or for anybody that acts suspiciously. The lady may be awaiting a visitor. And now be off, my boy. A lost minute may spoil the whole game. You will find Tom down-stairs, on hand for a job. Give it a couple of days more, at least."

With a look of pleasure Bilkins withdrew. He felt that he had the approbation of the great detective, and it would not have pleased him more to have inherited a fortune.

"There's the making of something in Bilkins," said Cop to himself, as he followed the young man with his eyes. "He argues shrewdly, and there are not a better pair of eyes on the force. I feel encouraged about this Alice Johnson matter. It looks as if that young lady was coming into our case. There is one point yet to find out. She has been two days in the city. Has she called on her friend Mrs. Hamilton? If not she is certainly in hiding. I must find out at once. And I have other reasons for an interview with Dorsey Hamilton at his home."

An hour afterward a person left the door of the detective's office who was very unlike Cop Colt himself. The spruce figure, erect gait, and clean cut, close-shaven face of the detective, were exchanged for the pursy form, rolling gait, and wrinkled and deeply bearded face of Job Benson, the old Californian miner. Cop's neat-fitting dress was similarly exchanged for the rough attire, and the coarse beaver overcoat of old Job. No one, not already acquainted with the fact, would have dreamed that the good-looking detective had been transformed into this rough old frontiersman.

He gained the street by a rear passage, not caring to be seen emerging from his office in his present attire. It was after sunset, and he had little reason to dread observation, but caution was so bound up in his every movement that it had become part of his very being.

"Kalkerlate I want to see my nevvy," he muttered, with a sly laugh. "Ther' mought be eyes on that thar door as would think C. C. was a nice cake to bite. But I somehow consider as old Job kin call on the young sprout 'thout danger."

He continued to laugh to himself as he fell into the mining vernacular as easily as if it was his native language. If there was one thing that Cop particularly enjoyed it was to masquerade in some such fashion as this, and it was the delight of his life to utterly deceive shrewd men by assuming some fantastic character like the present.

It was seven o'clock in the evening when he rung the bell at Mrs. Hamilton's residence. That good lady herself came to the door.

"How d'y do?" asked Job, pushing rudely into the doorway. "Reckon as how ye ain't furgot the old man. Called t'other day fur a confab with the youngster. Kinder in the notion to 'vestigate him ag'in."

Mrs. Hamilton drew back, a little offended. She did not like the rough and ill-bred manners of this stranger, and could not imagine what business he could have with her son. Dorsey had taken care not to tell her who he was.

"I am afraid you cannot see him, sir. You are a stranger; and he does not care to receive even his friends."

"Somehow I've got a notion as he won't mind seein' old Job," answered the visitor, with a queer laugh. "Didn't tell you who the old feller was, then?"

"I did not ask him," she answered coldly. "I prefer not to meddle with my son's private business."

"Now I kinder like that thar sentiment," said Job, coolly seating himself, and drawing a huge plug of tobacco from his pocket. "If everybody was so good at tendin' to their own bizness, ma'am, ther'd be a deuced sight less trouble in this wooden world. Spose ye tell the youngster as old Job, of Quaker Gulch, has struck a lead in this here shanty. If he don't want me I reckon it won't take the boy long to let out his idears on that p'int."

He took a huge bite from the plug, lifted one leg over the other, and settled himself comfortably back, as if he did not feel in the least trifle of a hurry.

Mrs. Hamilton looked at him with more displeasure than ever. Yet there was a shade of despair in her face. The old miner looked as if he had thoroughly settled himself, and would be as hard to move as a boulder.

After a minute's doubt she turned pettishly away, and went back into the house.

"Thought I'd fetch her," chuckled old Job. "Ther's nothin' like anchoring down."

In a minute or two she returned, accompanied by Dorsey. The expression of the good woman changed, when she saw the ardent manner in which her son greeted the visitor.

"I am glad you came," declared Dorsey, offering his hand. "I was just thinking about—"

"Yes, I s'pose so," Job interrupted. "Young folks is allers thinkin'. And sometimes talkin'. Got a pie to cut open with you, young man."

"Come up-stairs to my room," cried Dorsey eagerly. "Excuse me, mother, but I have some private business with this gentleman."

"Told ye the lad'd be glad to see me," said Job, with a sly glance at the good lady. "Don't often make no mistake in my prospectin'."

"It is his affair," she replied coldly. "It is not for me to meddle in it."

There was a hurt tone in her voice. Dorsey turned quickly back on the stairs.

"It will not be many days before you know what all this means, mother. You should know now, but it is not all my own secret."

"It's all on the square, Mrs. Hamilton," declared Job. "I'm an old miner, you see, and I've struck a lead that I've a notion'll be suthin' in the lad's pocket. But we Californians never let out on our finds till we're sure o' pay-dirt, and have got our claim staked out."

Mrs. Hamilton followed him with her eyes in something of a stew. She had not a remote idea of what he was talking about, but there was a show of honesty about the old fellow that took her despite herself. Her face wore a more mollified look.

"And now, Mr. Colt," cried Dorsey eagerly, after they had reached the shelter of his room. "You are here with some object. Has anything new been learned? Are the skies clearing? I am more than anxious for a quick relief."

Cop looked at him closely. There was something in the young man's manner that attracted his attention. He answered, however, with his ordinary quiet coolness:

"Our birds have made no new tracks. I am here only to ask a question or two. And I prefer not to be seen coming here in proper person. You made one serious mistake the other day, Mr. Hamilton."

"How?" cried Dorsey somewhat alarmed.

"In failing to follow Miss Johnson. I have been ever since seeking in vain to discover her abiding-place."

"But why? Do you suspect her of any complicity in the plot? No, no, that is impossible."

"Nothing is impossible," answered Cop, impressively. "In our business, at least. As for suspecting, that is too strong a word. But I simply wish to know what business brought her back to the city, and who is her derelict correspondent. Has she called on your mother since her return?"

"Why, no. And that is strange."

"It is suspicious, which is a stronger word. Evidently she has her reasons for concealing her presence in the city. At least from all but one party. Who is that party? This is what I am determined to find out."

"Do you think—"

"I think nothing. I only search. If nothing comes of it, it is lost labor. There are thousands of useless hammer-strokes, you know, before the broken car-wheel is found. I strike here and there, and listen for the ring of the metal. And now, to talk of another subject. Where were you when Mr. Markham gave you the key-word to the safe, on the night of the robbery?"

Dorsey looked at him in surprise.

"In this house. In this room. He called on me here, gave me the word, and left the key in my charge."

"In this room?" Cop's sharp eyes seemed to take in every point in the room at a flash. "Two doors. That one leads into the hall. Where does this lead?" He rose and turned the handle of a door in the side wall.

"That leads to a bedroom."

"Yes, I see." The door opened to his hand, and revealed a small communicating room.

"Who slept here at the time of the robbery?"

"My cousin, John Clark."

"Ah! And was the door usually left unlocked, as now?"

"Yes. It was never locked."

Cop turned and looked at him.

"Then the thing is brought to this. Either you or Markham revealed the secret, which is improbable, or some inmate of the house caught it by listening at one of these doors. I presume Markham spoke loud enough to be heard."

"Too loud. I warned him against it."

"Why? Did you suspect any one?"

"No. But I heard a movement."

"Where?"

"It seemed to be behind that door." He pointed to the communicating door.

"Ah! John Clark then is the culprit, so far as evidence goes. He heard the secret word. He could easily have stolen the key, and returned it without your knowledge. He could as easily have placed the jewels and papers in your room. And his employer, Joseph Flite, could as easily have done the rest of the job. The skies look clearer."

"What shall be done? Shall we not bring suit against Flite at once?"

"No, no. Why are you in such haste? Any precipitate movement might ruin our whole game."

"Because—" Dorsey hesitated and flushed. "You asked—asked me to call on Miss Amberly."

"And you have done so?" asked Cop quickly.

"I met her—by accident."

"With what result?"

"You were right. I was wrong," answered Dorsey in a low tone, though his eyes spoke louder than words.

"And Flite had cause to hate you through jealousy?"

"I think so. Indeed, I am sure so."

"Give me your hand, my good fellow. That simplifies the matter amazingly. We are getting to the bottom of a deep bag of secrets."

"He is the man then? There is hope of my innocence being established?"

Dorsey spoke eagerly and excitedly. The world seemed opening and brightening before him.

"Not so fast. There are several things yet to be settled. Who bought Judge Norwood's new team? Why did Warren give you employment? Who corresponded with Alice Johnson, and why has she returned to the city? All these mysteries must be cleared up ere we can take a decisive step. But this I will say, that I can see the beginning of the end. The fox has burrowed deep, but the ferret is hunting him closely. So give me your hand again, my boy."

"She loves me," half whispered Dorsey. "She has acknowledged it. I have but to prove my innocence to win the most glorious woman in America."

"Good. You shall win her, then. By Jove you shall! Trust to me. I will follow the fox through all his windings, and dig him out if he buries himself fathoms deep."

"One word more. May I reveal to Miss Amberly the subject of our suspicions? I have half promised."

"Not yet. It is not safe. And now, youngster, ain't ye goin' to see yer old uncle to the door? Young folks hed some perliteness in my goslin' days, but I reckon as perliteness is gone out o' fashion. Old chaps has got to do the'r own crawlin' now-a-days."

In a few minutes afterward the burly form of old Job Benson might have been seen rolling like a water-logged tar along the street.

CHAPTER XII.

A QUESTION OF A DIAMOND RING.

It was Thursday night. The hour of seven had lately sounded from a neighboring clock. Few persons were abroad, it being the supper hour

of a considerable portion of the community. Among those out were two persons, neither of them very creditable members of society, to judge from their dress and general appearance.

One of them was already known as John Clark, the dissolute cousin of Dorsey Hamilton. The other had a distant resemblance to old Jake Jumper. Yet there were certain marked points of difference. It might have been the shrewd old tramp in disguise, but he would not have been easily recognized by his associates.

They were not in company. On the contrary it seemed a clear case of trailing. Clark was in advance, and was followed, at a reasonable distance, by the tramp.

This proceeding had now continued for many squares. Finally Clark stopped in front of a neat-looking saloon, in a respectable district of the city. He looked around him for some time, not suspiciously, however, but with the air of one who had nothing particular in view. Apparently he did not dream of espionage.

He certainly saw nothing suspicious. Several persons were passing, in different directions, and on a fire-plug at a distance was seated a ragged-looking customer. But no one seemed paying the slightest attention to him.

After several minutes he turned and entered the saloon. Instantly the tenant of the fire-plug left his perch and strolled up.

"Harry Bird's place," he said, reading the sign-board. "Won't do. Harry wouldn't stand a scare-crow like me. I've got to make some change in my attire."

A few steps further on was a narrow alley, leading in from the street. Into this the tramp plunged. There he went through some rapid evolutions. His ragged coat was taken off, turned, and put on inside out. It was a reversible coat, and was whole and sound on the side that now appeared. His greasy soft felt hat was put through the same evolution, and grew far more respectable. A comb run through his tangled hair and beard brought them into far better shape. By buttoning his coat the ragged attire beneath was concealed.

When the old fellow emerged from his hiding-place he could hardly have been taken for the same person. He looked fifty per cent more respectable, and though not well got up for genteel society might have passed for a weather-beaten workingman.

"I fancy I can pass muster now," he said, looking at himself with some satisfaction. "Now for my man."

He stationed himself within view of the door of the saloon, yet so as not to attract attention. Here he remained for some time. Persons were coming and going, several of whom entered or emerged from the drinking-saloon. But to none of these did the transformed tramp pay the least attention.

Presently the hour of eight sounded loud from a city clock. In a few minutes afterward, a flash came into the eyes of the scout. He had caught sight of the person for whom he was in waiting.

It was the tall, erect, well-dressed form, and narrow, severe face of Joseph Flite that had caught his eye.

This personage entered the saloon without the slightest hesitation. He evidently did not fear observation. Old Jake held back, looking after him curiously.

"It won't work to be too quick on the trigger," he muttered. "If I jump in now, he might think I am on his heels. I must give my man five minutes' grace. Yet every minute counts. The whole business might be done while I am waiting on time."

Less than five minutes had passed when he entered the saloon. He did so in a very unobtrusive fashion, gliding quietly in and up to the bar in a manner not likely to attract attention.

"A glass of ale, if you please," he said politely to the smart young man behind the bar.

While waiting for his drink his eyes seemed fixed on the buttons of his coat, yet in reality there was not a thing in the saloon which he had not fully taken in.

He saw a neatly fitted up drinking-room, occupied by several persons, who were seated or standing and engaged in conversation. Two of these stood leaning upon the bar. Two others were seated on the opposite side of the room, talking in a low tone. These he recognized at sight as the men he was after. Yet he took care not to look toward them.

"Have you got a pretzel?" he asked of the barkeeper, who had just brought his ale. "You don't mind my taking a seat, and drinking at leisure? I always like to take my time over my glass."

"All right," answered the young man, shortly.

Jake shuffled quietly across the floor, and sunk into a seat quite close to the two talkers. Mr. Flite looked at him sharply. But he only perceived a stupid-looking old codger, who was sipping his ale with immense satisfaction, and seeming to pay no attention to anything else. The two men continued their conversation without further heed to this old ale-bibber.

"I must make no mistake," continued Flite in a low tone. "If you are sure of the affair."

"Of course I'm sure. I saw the old Jew myself. She is the woman you want. And you know where to lay your hand on her."

"Why, yes," answered Flite, with a short laugh. "But I am never precipitate, my good man. Show the Jew the picture I gave you, and make sure he recognizes it. It is my rule never to move until I am sure of my ground, and then to move in earnest— Ha! my friend, where did you get that ring? Let me look at it?"

These last words were spoken in a quick tone of surprise. It seemed as if he had seen something that startled him.

"I got it honest," answered Clark hastily. "I don't choose to show it." He had turned slightly pale, and thrust his hand quickly into his pocket.

"Let me see it, I say," demanded Flite peremptorily. "Diamonds are a little out of character for you, Clark. And I fancy I have seen that ring before. Come, I must see it."

"Diamonds!" laughed Clark hoarsely. "Nonsense! It's only a bit of glass. Had it from my sweetheart as a keepsake."

"It is a diamond, I say. Come, come, I won't hurt it by looking at it."

"That's not the business we are here for," said Clark, with some dignity. "We are through with that, and I don't see as any more talk is wanted." He rose from his chair. "I will see the Jew, and report by letter, Mr. Flite."

"Then you refuse to show me the ring?"

"Yes. I refuse to show it to you."

"Oh, well, keep it to yourself then," said Mr. Flite, with a forced laugh. "It is probably only a bit of glass, though it struck me as familiar." Despite his laugh his face was stern and hard. "Don't write. Meet me here at this hour to-morrow with the information. Come, will you have something to drink?"

He led the way to the bar.

"Odd that," whispered Jake to his glass. "What's in that ring? Flite's new appointment is only for a chance to get a second look at it. And his treat now is for the same purpose."

If so it failed of its effect. Clark took up his glass with his left hand, and kept his right resolutely in his pocket.

"Here's to good luck," he said, tossing down the strong liquor as if it was so much water.

"I hope so," answered Mr. Flite shortly. "Good-night." He turned and left the saloon.

Clark looked after him with a grin of spite and triumph. He muttered something to himself, and in a minute followed his late companion to the street.

He walked slowly, and had not got very far when he was accosted by a familiar voice:

"Hey, croney, what's the lay, old rat? Don't ye want to fire up? I'm as dry as a lime-kiln in the innards."

He turned back. There stood his late comrade Jake Jumper. The man was transformed again into the seedy old tramp, and the face was now fully that of Jake.

"Put it thar," he cried, holding out his brown paw. "Does my optics good to see yer."

"Ah, old fellow, it is you, is it?"

"Tain't my apperition, anyhow. Come, let's lick'er. I'm flush, now you bet. D'y'e hear that rattle?"

He struck his pocket with his open palm, bringing out a jingle of silver or nickel.

"Guess I've had enough," answered Clark. "Just been priming up."

"I hain't then. And it's 'g'in' my principles to drink 'thout company."

It needed little persuasion to induce Clark to add to his potations, particularly at another's expense, and Jake soon had him in a drinking-place of far lower grade than that they had just left.

What the tramp's purpose was did not very clearly appear. He asked no questions concerning his companion's business with Mr. Flite, and made no effort to observe the ring, which had become an object of interest.

He seemed to have nothing in view except to get drunk as soon as possible, unless it were to make Clark drink as much liquor as he could hold.

A sharp observer, however, would have seen that Jake did not drink all the liquor that went into his glass, and that he was not half as boozy as he seemed.

Their drinking bout lasted for an hour, at the end of which time Clark had his head on the table, in a tipsy snooze.

Jake looked at him in disgust.

"Lie there, you drunken fool," he said. "It isn't to my taste to get a man in this condition, but business before pleasure is a good motto, and I fancy I've done a good job to-night."

He rose and paid for the liquor consumed. He seemed very drunk himself, as he stood swaying by the bar.

"Le' im have his snoozer," he demanded of the barkeeper in a thick voice. "Ain't got a strong—hic—strong 'ead like me."

When John Clark wakened an hour afterward, it was to find that his companion had disappeared. And, to the drunkard's utter consternation, with him had vanished the diamond

ring. Jake Jumper had not stood treat without an object.

At very nearly the time that the old tramp was engaged in this not very honest procedure, Dorsey Hamilton was deep in conversation with a gentleman with whom he had become acquainted in a business way since his engagement with William Warren.

They were seated in the conversation-room of one of the city hotels. The gentleman in question seemed an easy-going, free-spoken man-about-town, of frank countenance and ready confidence.

"I tell you what, Hamilton," he was saying, "it's my solid opinion that there are many men out of jail who ought to be there, and many get jugged without fair warrant. I know something about human nature, and I believe in you, if you did have such an ugly pull."

"Thank you!" said Dorsey, extending his hand gratefully.

"Oh, I never mince matters," answered the other. "I take folks as I find them. Faith, I know a thing or two, my boy, about what is going on in this town. If I chose to tell I could set some people by the ears. Now there is your present employer— But that is *sub rosa*. I am talking off the card now."

"Not at all," answered Dorsey, eagerly. "I have certain reasons for wanting to know something about Mr. Warren's record. Of course, I don't ask you to divulge confidences."

"Oh, there is no confidence in the matter; yet I fancy I know more about the man's history than is generally known. So you have not found him altogether rose-water, eh?"

"He has treated me very well—too well, perhaps," replied Dorsey. "I am surprised to find how he trusts me. And that makes me curious to know more about him."

"Tricks you, does he?" answered the other, with a low whistle. "That's queer; it isn't his style. Faith, I don't understand that."

"Do you think it suspicious?"

"It is odd, at any rate," was the cautious answer. "He is the last man I know of that would look for a confidential clerk in a jail delivery. There is something behind all this."

"Tell me something about the man?" asked Dorsey. "You have certainly roused my curiosity. I promise not to reveal my authority."

"I don't care much whether you do or not, for all I can say is known to fifty others. Or nearly all, at least. Warren was fast in his young days. Too fond of women. Slashed away his money. He failed, you know, something over five years ago, and it was said at the time that his money had been wasted in dissipation. At any rate, he became suddenly flush and started business again. Where he got his money from is a question. But I have reason to know that he was engaged in some deep speculations, as agent for some other party, and I fancy that some of the cash stuck in his fingers. I am not sure, it is true, but I suspect he has ever since been under some man's thumb. I pick up a good many points in my floating around, you see."

"Do you know that man's name?"

"No."

"Was it this?" He wrote the name of Joseph Flite on a slip of paper, and handed it over.

Mr. Fleming read it, and looked up in surprise.

"What makes you think that?" he asked.

"Certain circumstances."

Mr. Fleming ran his fingers doubtfully through his hair, while a questioning expression passed over his face.

"By Jove, that makes me think. Can it be? I always thought there was bad blood between those two men. They frown on each other like two thunderclouds. Is that a blind? You have set me to thinking, Mr. Hamilton. You may be right. I am curious to look further into this business."

"Let me know the result," asked Dorsey.

"I will."

"Mr. Warren is rich now."

"He was poor enough once, at any rate. He was a society man in his earlier days. I can't say how many women he had in love with him at once. At any rate he gave up that sort of thing rather sudden. Some folks said that Warren had been caught in earnest by a pair of black eyes. If he was he kept his courtship very secret. Perhaps he had good reasons then for playing quiet. At any rate that's all over now. He has been married these three months, and that not to the black-eyed girl. His wife I know to have been a later acquaintance. What has become of Miss Black-eyes is an unsettled question."

Dorsey sat for a moment in deep thought.

"I knew the most of this before," he at length said, "but you have given me some new points. I have a reason for wishing to know more. What that reason is I cannot just now divulge. But if you should learn anything more—"

"You have made me curious, Mr. Hamilton. I shall certainly ask some questions.—And now about that other matter that we drifted off from."

They continued this conversation on a business subject which is of no interest to our story.

CHAPTER XIII.

CLARE AMBERLY AND HER VISITORS.

In the stylish house on Walnut street to which we once before conducted the reader the same two persons were again present, Clare Amberly and her visitor Westly Osborn.

The day was a chill one, in mid April, but warm waves of furnace heat filled the richly-furnished apartment, and made there a mid-summer temperature. Osborn had his spring overcoat on his arm, as if he were about to leave, and had stopped only for a last word.

The position of the two persons was a striking one. Clare sat upright in her chair, her hands grasping its velvet-covered arms, as if she had started up from a reclining attitude. Her face wore an indefinable expression, the lips firm-set, the eyes full of a strange light.

Osborn stood in a graceful attitude, his hand resting on a table, his body bent easily forward, his face full of earnest demand.

"Not now, at least," she cried, in a heightened tone, in reply to something he had said. "Not now, and perhaps never. I will not deny that I esteem you, Mr. Osborn. But it is not esteem you demand."

"I am not so sure of that," he eagerly replied. "I had hoped, indeed, for your love. I had filled my soul with desire for a return of my own deep affection. But esteem leads to love. What then hinders that we shall be happy together?"

"It cannot be," she firmly replied, though with a look as if she feared to give him pain. "Do not urge me further, I pray. I should be glad to do anything to make you happy, except—except what you ask."

"But why?" he asked earnestly, and with a cloud on his brow. "I have waited now five years for a favorable answer, and still you consign me to hopeless waiting. You love no other. You have no favored suitor. Why then—"

He paused and looked at her closely. His last words had brought a sudden flush to her face, and a look of softer luster to her steady eyes.

"Or do you love another? Have I then some favored rival?"

"Sir!" she answered indignantly.

"Excuse me, but your face spoke as much."

"I do not hold myself answerable to you for my feelings."

He was on the point of making some hasty response. His eyes flashed with anger. But he checked himself in time to avoid a break between him and the woman he loved.

"I have been too hasty," he said, in a low tone. "I had no right to speak to you in such a manner. But love is not governed by the cold rules of reason. I will not press you further now. And yet I go not quite without hope."

He turned away. Yet on reaching the door he looked back, with a sorrowful and pleading countenance. Her face had changed its angry firmness for a soft and regretful look.

"I thank you, Westley," she said, simply. "You are always my dear friend. Remember that."

He was gone. She sank back listlessly in her chair, her fingers playing idly with its velvet tassel.

Had she seen the hard look that came to his face outside the door it might have given her different thoughts.

"She is still brooding on that old idea," he muttered, savagely. "If I can but drive that out of her head she is mine. I will! By Heaven, I will! I will die rather than lose that woman."

Fifteen minutes afterward another visitor was announced to Miss Amberly. She still sat, half-buried in the depths of her velvet chair, looking as if she was lost in some fond dream of the future.

She took in her dainty fingers the card handed her by the servant.

"I do not know this gentleman," she remarked.

"He requests me to say that he has called on business," answered the servant.

"On business? Very well, I will see him."

She rose from her reclining attitude as the servant retired, and took another chair, by the table. The next minute there entered a gentleman whom she was sure she had never seen before, yet whom she could not help looking at with deep interest. There was something in his face that betokened no ordinary man.

Yet there was nothing special in figure, face, or dress. It was rather the keen gray eyes, with their look as if they had taken in every feature of the apartment at a single glance, and the strange and penetrating manner in which they rested upon herself, that arrested her attention.

He entered rather awkwardly, as if not used to such society.

"Pray be seated, sir," she remarked. "To what do I owe the honor of this visit? You have business with me, the servant said."

He did not answer immediately. His eyes were fixed on her face, not offensively, yet in a manner that disturbed her. She stirred uneasily and looked again at the card in her hand.

"Mr. Coply Colt," she read.

"Detective," he added.

"Ah!" she looked up with a new sensation.

She now knew what was meant by that searching look, that seemed to penetrate to the very soul. "Yes, yes, I have heard of you, Mr. Colt. But what business can you have with me?"

"Something more than five years ago," he replied, "a robbery took place in this city. The safe of Markham & Co., Brokers, was robbed of a large sum of money, and of certain papers and valuables. You will remember."

"Certainly, certainly," she exclaimed with sudden interest. "A person was arrested and convicted of the robbery. He is now at liberty, and—"

She checked her hasty speech. Perhaps she was going too fast. Yet her eyes were fixed on Colt with an ardent question. She had half-risen from her chair in her eagerness.

"The jewelry stolen belonged to you, I believe," he quietly continued, with polite disregard of her emotion, though he had not failed to observe it. "It was put there for safe-keeping."

"Why, yes," she replied indifferently. "Some of it, at least."

"Then will you be kind enough to tell me if you recognize this trinket?"

He took something from his vest-pocket which he handed to her. A flash came from it as it passed between their fingers. It was a solitaire diamond ring.

Her eyes opened wide on perceiving it. She looked at it intently, with a flushed cheek and contracted brow, examining it with close care.

"Where did you get this?" she demanded impulsively.

"Do you recognize it?" he quietly repeated.

"Yes. It is mine. It was part of the stolen jewelry."

"Are you sure, Miss Amberly? Consider fully. There might be many rings like this. It is important that there shall be no error."

She examined it again.

"There can be no doubt," she answered in a decided tone. "Do you observe that this part of the gold clasp of the diamond is slightly defective? And here is a scratch on the inside of the ring which I made there myself."

"Then there can be no doubt?"

"I would be willing to swear to the ring anywhere. But—" she hesitated, and grew pale. "Is it—does it involve Mr. Hamilton—the convicted person, I mean—is it new evidence against him?"

She had grown paler as she spoke. This ring seemed to have come back from the grave of the past. Did it portend disaster to the man she loved?

"It is evidence in his favor, I hope," answered Cop, quietly watching her speaking face. "Do you know that he denies his guilt, and is doing his utmost to discover the real criminal?"

"Yes, yes, I know. And you?"

"I am working for him. That ring is part of the chain of evidence I have discovered."

"Oh, Mr. Colt!" she said, leaning forward with clasped hands, "how I hope you may succeed! I feel—I am sure, that he has been foully dealt with. Any evidence I can give—"

"I hope you may not be brought into it," rejoined Cop. "It is not pleasant business for ladies. Yet I may have to call on you to publicly acknowledge the ownership of this ring."

"Whenever you will, sir. Can you tell me, Mr. Colt, where you obtained it? Can you tell me what evidence you have gained in Dor—in this gentleman's favor, and whom you suspect of the crime? I am ever so deeply interested."

"I should be glad to tell you, Miss Amberly, but it is my rule never to reveal incomplete work. I may say this much, however, with the assurance that it will go no further. The ring was found in the hands of a person whom I suspect of being concerned in a plot against Mr. Hamilton. And this person I know to be a creature of one of the firm of Markham & Co."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, starting half to her feet. "This can not be possible. To whom do you refer?"

He looked at her searchingly.

"Who should you say, from your knowledge of the firm?"

"Excuse me. This matter is too important to trust to a guess. Please give me the name."

"I refer to Mr. Joseph Flite."

"No, no, impossible!" she hastily ejaculated. "He is stern, harsh, cold-tempered; but he is not capable of crime."

"I do not accuse him of crime," was the quiet response. "May I ask you a question, Miss Amberly? It is of a delicate nature, yet I hope you will consent to answer."

"Let me hear it," she requested. She was in a nervous flutter from the importance of the news she had just received.

"I am told that Mr. Flite was a suitor of yours. Even that he asked your hand in marriage and was refused. It is important that I should know if this is true. Much may depend on it."

"It is true," she answered, without hesitation.

"Did this take place shortly before the date of the robbery?"

"It did."

"And have you any reason to think that Mr.

Flite grew jealous? That he imputed your refusal to your having an affection for some other person, and that he might seek to punish you and your favored lover?"

"Why, no. There was certainly nothing of the kind. His offer was made like an ordinary business transaction. Immediately afterward he married. I never thought that Mr. Flite was troubled with the inconvenience of a heart, or was capable of such a feeling as jealousy. It seemed to me that he had concluded to marry, and that he went the round of his lady friends, much as if he had a cargo of wheat to sell to the first bidder."

Cop looked at her animated countenance, while a shade of perplexity passed over his face.

"Then you think he was not open to the passion of jealousy?"

"He?" She laughed. "Well, no, I should fancy not."

"Thank you, Miss Amberly," said Cop, gravely, as he rose and took his hat. "You have given me some important information. But you have puzzled me a little, I admit. I thought I saw a strong motive, but you have dissipated that idea. No matter, there is abundance left yet. I may be obliged to call on you again."

"I shall be happy to give you any help in my power," she earnestly answered. "And I sincerely hope you may succeed in your task. I do not believe in Mr. Hamilton's guilt, despite the verdict of the court. I hope, for—for my sake, Mr. Colt, you may do your utmost to prove his innocence."

What her words did not reveal, her looks and attitude did. The keen-eyed detective needed no further evidence of her love for his client. A half-mile came to his face as he answered:

"You can trust to me, Miss Amberly. I am something of a sleuth-hound. I do not lightly leave a trail which I have once struck. Good-morning."

He was gone. Clare sunk back in her chair with very different feelings from those which had followed Mr. Osborn's departure. She began to think. Could she do anything to aid the detective in his quest?

Meanwhile Cop was walking at a brisk pace along the street, his face yet wearing a perplexed look.

"One thing is sure," he said to himself. "She loves Dorsey Hamilton. And a confounded lucky fellow he is, to keep the love of such a woman, with his record. She is one in a thousand. But that jealousy idea falls by the board. She has knocked it dead. I must revise the programme. Ha, Bilkins! Are you looking for me?"

He had just caught sight of his spy, gazing at him with a glowing expression.

"Yes, sir," declared the youth, with great eagerness. "Tom and I have done the job. We have tracked the young lady of the photograph."

"Eh? That's news at any rate. How was it worked?"

"I saw her post a letter in a lamp-box. That was last night. This afternoon a gentleman visited the house from which she came. I don't know who he is, but Tom is on his track; I thought it best to report."

"Very good. Where was the house?"

"Near Sixth and Master, some distance away from the point I had fixed on."

"Then I was right?"

"You were right."

"Very well. I will be at my office in an hour. If you see Tom tell him to report there without delay."

CHAPTER XIV.

A JOB IN SILVER PLATE.

"FAIX, an' it's a cryin' shame it is, to belie an honest body, as has niver done a hap'orth wrong, at all, at all. To think o' me comin' from ould Ireland to this mane countrry to be accused o' stalin'! And me own mother's daughter!"

"There, that will do. The game's up, Bridget, and talk won't mend it. Come, I have no time to waste."

The speakers were a stern official, with the policeman's star on his coat, and an Irish servant girl, a frowsy yet shrewd-looking nymph of the kitchen.

The scene was in the kitchen of Mr. Flite's town residence. That gentleman himself was present, as also the young man in brown, whom we have formerly seen acting as a spy on old Job Benson.

"There is enough of this," said Mr. Flite harshly. "Take the woman away. I will be at the magistrate's office with witnesses to sustain my charge."

"Take the woman away, is it?" cried Bridget defiantly. "That's 'asy said now, Flite, but maybe ye'd like to be after doin' it yerself. Nice tratement this is now, after I have moiled and toiled fur five blessed years in yer dirthy kitchen, and niver got a thanks wid me wages. An' to accuse a Flanagan o' stalin'! Sure af I tell all I know—"

"You are quite welcome to tell all you know," answered the stern broker. "What I know is that I trusted you and you have robbed me.—There, you need say nothing more. This gentle-

man put me on your track." He pointed to the spy. "I have tracked the stolen silver to the pawnbroker. He is ready to testify that it was you pawned it. Now you know why you are arrested. Take her away, sir."

The defiant Irishwoman looked somewhat wilted after this plain statement. Her face changed its expression, and her voice assumed a wheedling tone.

"Sure an' ye wouldn't have the heart to send me to jail, an' on the word of a lyin' pawnbroker? An' whatever's to become of my karacter; an' me baggage that's in yer honor's house?"

"I fancy the baggage is of no more value than the character. It must stay here for the present till it is searched."

"S'arch my baggage!" cried Bridget, with well-affected astonishment. "S'arch the baggage of an honest girl, that's wrought her soul out in yer kitchen! Do it, ye spaldeen, an' I'll have the law o' ye, as sure as my name's Bridgy Flanagan! Did ony body ever hear the like of the unrasonableness o' that now?"

Mr Flite turned on his heel and walked away. He knew better than to keep up an argument with a girl of Bridget's stamp. Two hours afterward the indignant kitchen lady found herself under lock and key in one of the city police stations, under the charge of the theft of several pieces of solid silver table-ware from Mr. Flite's residence.

On the evening of the same day in which this event occurred, Bilkins knocked at the door of Cop Colt's office.

"Come in," spoke the voice of the detective.

"I didn't expect to find you at this hour," apologized the spy, as he entered.

"I had work to finish up," answered Cop shortly. "What's in the wind now, Bilkins?"

"There's one or two little matters that I thought you ought to know," answered the spy diffidently.

"That's right," replied Cop. "Any report yet from Tom?"

"Yes."

"Ah! What has he to say?"

"He tracked his game to a house out Arch street," rejoined Bilkins. "This morning he was again early on guard. The gentleman took the cars, and went to a wholesale grocery place on North Water street."

"The deuce!" Cop seemed suddenly interested. "What name?"

"William Warren."

"Did he locate the man? Was it Warren himself?"

"Yes."

"Ah! just wait."

He turned to his table on which lay some letters which he had been about to read when Bilkins entered. He picked out one of these, which bore the post-mark of Clifton, N. H. This he tore open quickly, and ran his eye rapidly over the contents.

He leaned back in his chair after doing so, with a queer smile.

"I would like to give you a bit of advice, Bilkins," he said. "You may be a detective, some day."

"Any advice from you, Mr. Colt, must be valuable."

"It is this. Always work up an unpromising trail. Now here's a girl that even an old fox like me felt sure could not have anything to do with this case. Yet she suddenly becomes one of the most important links. If I hadn't kept to my rule I might have been left completely in the dark. As it is I fancy I have the game now in my own hands."

"In what way, Mr. Colt, if I might venture to ask!"

"You are on the case, Bilkins. I don't mind giving you some points. You see there were three persons living in Miss Hamilton's house at the date her son was arrested for robbery. One of these was a cousin of young Hamilton, one John Clark—What ails you? Do you know him?"

"Please go on, sir. I will tell you afterwards."

"A second was a servant girl, named Bridget Flanagan. There you start again, Bilkins. Do you know her, too?"

"It is very curious," answered Bilkins. "I have something odd to tell you after you get through."

"The third was a lady friend of Mrs. Hamilton. Name, Alice Johnson. The young lady you have been shadowing."

"Ah!" cried Bilkins, with yet deeper interest.

"Well, now for the behavior of these three parties. Bridget Flanagan was discharged by Mrs. Hamilton immediately after the robbery. She was a stupid kitchen-girl. I have made no effort to follow her up."

"That wasn't according to the rule you just gave me," muttered Bilkins, diffidently.

"Ha!" cried Cop, a little disconcerted. "Then you know something of this girl?"

"I have just learned something."

"Well, let that wait. John Clark, the second party, has become a drunken vagrant. I have several good reasons for believing him to be deep in the plot against Dorsey Hamilton. Have you got some points about him, too?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. The third party is the young lady of the photograph. She continued to reside with Mrs. Hamilton for three years after her son's conviction, and was so kind and sympathizing with her that no one would have dreamed that she was in any plot against her son's liberty. Two years ago Miss Johnson left the city and went to reside with a friend of her family in New Hampshire. There she has stayed until now. All that seems perfectly regular and square, eh, Bilkins?"

"I should say so."

"But, my dear boy, now listen to this. The young lady keeps up a correspondence during her absence with some one in this city. Finally her letters begin to fall off, and she gets uneasy. Then they stop altogether. Miss Johnson at once, against the wishes of her friends, sets off for Philadelphia. I need not tell you the story of her actions since she reached here."

"I ought to know that pretty well."

"Well then, I, in my official capacity, dropped a letter of inquiry to her friend, Mr. Cornwall, asking for any information as to this secret correspondence. I have his answer here now. He made a strict search, but discovered nothing but a scrap of paper torn from the corner of a letter. Here it is. It has but two words and part of a name."

Bilkins read with much interest the words on the minute fragment of paper. They consisted of the words "peril of" and the four letters "—rren," seemingly part of the signature.

"Warren!" he cried. "The same man!"

"So it would seem. I must compare it, however, with Mr. Warren's signature. What do you think of the look of things, Bilkins? Come, now, let me hear what you have in your budget."

"It isn't much," answered Bilkins modestly.

"But every little counts to a man with his eyes open."

"I was coming past Magistrate Jones's office a couple of hours ago," resumed Bilkins. "I saw there was some case on inside, so I strolled in. And the first parties I set eyes on were the pair you set me to watch, Mr. Flite and Harry Enoch, the Pinkerton chap."

Cop squared himself up and looked at Bilkins with more interest.

"Go on," he said.

"I soon took in the case. It seems that one of Mr. Flite's servants had been arrested on the charge of stealing some silver plate. You saw how I started when you spoke of Bridget Flanagan. That was the name of the thief."

"The thief, Bilkins? An arrest don't make a thief."

"Evidence went dead against her," continued the spy. "Harry Enoch was the first witness. He had been engaged by Mr. Flite, on missing his silver, to work up the job. But some of the fences were fly. He couldn't work them. So he put Mr. Flite in communication with another chap who had the inside ring. This was a fellow who looked as if he had been weaned on whisky. He answered to the name of John Clark."

Bilkins looked closely at the detective. But he saw no trace of emotion at this name. Cop expected it from what had passed before.

"Clark had some trouble with the job," continued the speaker. "But he finally tracked the silver to an old Jew fence named Barny Aarons. The Israelite was put on the stand, and he swore that the prisoner was the party who had sold him the plunder. The old hound squirmed a little; but he was nailed, and had to split."

Colt threw himself back in his chair, and drew his hat down over his brows. He looked as if he had struck a snag. Bilkins watched him curiously.

"Well," he asked impatiently. "Is that all?"

"The girl was committed," answered Bilkins. "The fence got off, on Flite's promise not to prosecute if he'd own up and hand over. I watched Flite and his scouts, and saw money pass between them. I caught a few words, too, between Flite and Clark, after Enoch had gone off."

"Ah! What was said?"

"It was something about a ring. Flite was very sharp about it. Said he must see it, and he'd pinch him if he didn't show it. Clark swore he hadn't it. It had been stolen from him when he was drunk. He vowed deep revenge on the thief, if he could once get his ten fingers on him."

"What else?"

"That was about all. Clark said he had the ring from his sweetheart, and that it was only a piece of glass. They sailed out of my hearing after that. But I could see they kept up the spat on the ring for some time."

"See here, Bilkins, I will give you a whole pie if you can find out from Clark where he got that ring. Or if you can worm any information out of him. Prime the fellow a trifle, and something may be done. I give you credit for being a sharp dodger."

"Where can I find him?"

"Leave that to me. I'll put you on his track."

"Can you give me any points to work on? It won't do to rouse the fellow's suspicions."

"Yes. You have seen the ring, remember, in the hands of an old tramp, named Jake Jumper. And he told you how he slipped it from the finger of a boozy beat, named Jack Clark."

The detective's face wore a quizzical look. Bilkins looked at him with surprise, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"You're the man for my money, Mr. Colt," he declared. "It's a sharp fellow that gets up in the morning before you. I'll go for Mr. John Clark."

A few minutes afterward he was gone. The detective's face grew serious as he sat there alone. He bit his lips, and thrust his fingers nervously through his hair.

"It looks like a turn of the tide," he said to himself dubiously. "Here's Flite's business with Clark and Enoch explained. It has nothing whatever to do with Dorsey Hamilton. A mighty promising trail has peered out all of a sudden. But there are new tracks opening. Bridget Flanagan is a thief, and is in quod. And here's this mystery of the ring, and of the Warren-Johnson correspondence. If one door is shut there is another opened."

CHAPTER XV.

A LEAF OUT OF THE PAST.

In a plainly-furnished apartment of a dwelling up North Sixth street sat a young lady, who seemed by no means at ease in her mind. She was of considerable beauty of form and face, and dressed with much taste, and an evident attempt at display. Her countenance indicated a yielding, pliant nature, of emotional tendency, and capable, under severe strain, of passionate energy. She was a woman who might love strongly, but could never think or resolve deeply.

Just at present she seemed much disturbed. The fancy work she was trying to do she threw down pettishly, and rose and paced the apartment with peevish impatience.

"I will not bear it," she cried, in a tone of shrill spite. "He is playing with me. Does he think he can make me his tool? If I should tell—But I dare not do that. And he knows it, the wretch!"

She paused in a listening attitude. The ring of the door-bell had met her ears. Her face grew softer, and a smile of expectation came upon it.

"Is it he? Perhaps I have been hasty. If he only knew how I love him.—But he knows that too well—well enough to—"

The door opened.

"Gentlemen to see you, Miss Johnson."

"A gentleman, you mean," she replied. "Please show him in."

"No, miss; there are two gentlemen."

"Two?" she repeated, with a marked change of expression. "Has he not come alone? Or can it be—Please ask them to walk in," she said to the surprised servant, checking her involuntary words.

A look of doubt and astonishment, almost of terror, crossed her face on perceiving the person who first entered, in response to this request.

"Dorsey Hamilton!" she ejaculated, with white lips and staring eyes.

"Yes, Alice," he replied quietly, offering his hand. "As I learned that you were in the city, and had not called to see my mother, I have called on you."

She retreated to a chair, without noticing his outstretched hand.

"I thought you were—in prison," she faltered.

"Oh, no, Alice," he smiled. "You were away, and did not hear of my release. Now, if you had called on my mother—"

"I was intending to," she hastily answered. "I have only been two days in the city."

"Four days. Excuse me for correcting you," remarked Dorsey's companion.

She turned hastily and angrily toward the speaker. She saw a man of medium height and size, with clean-shaven face, and a countenance not specially marked, though there was something in its expression that troubled her.

"I do not know you," she said, severely. "What right have you to question my words?"

"Pardon me," remarked Dorsey. "This gentleman is a friend of mine—Mr. Colt. But he is right. Your memory has not served you well. You have been four days here."

"Sir!" she said, with growing anger.

"I saw you arrive. How else could I know where to find you? You forgot that you took special pains to conceal yourself. You apparently did not want visitors."

He quietly seated himself and laid his hat on the table. Miss Johnson looked at him with an expression in which indignation was giving way to dread. There was something so strange in this. Her eyes wandered to the quiet-looking personage who had taken a seat in a corner of the room. There was something about him that increased her disturbance of mind.

"Then why do you visit me?" she peevishly demanded.

"I fancied I would be welcome to my mother's friend."

"You are mistaken in supposing that Miss Johnson does not want visitors," broke in the quiet man in the corner. "On the contrary, she is ill at ease just now because an expected visitor has not called."

"Sir!" she cried again, but this time with more of terror than anger.

"Yet Mr. Warren may have reasons of his own for not calling," continued the speaker. "A newly-married man—"

"Married!" she exclaimed in a tone of consternation, springing impulsively to her feet.

"Cannot in conscience desert his young wife to visit other ladies."

"Married! It is false! How dare you come here with such a lie? I say it is false!" she repeated in a shrill tone.

"No, Alice," said Dorsey calmly. "There is one thing peculiar about Mr. Colt. He never makes mistakes. You can believe whatever he says."

"Married?" She had now grown deadly pale. She sunk back into her chair, resting her head feebly on her hand. Her eyes now furtively sought the gentleman in the corner. They seemed to avoid Dorsey.

"You have reason to be surprised and pained," remarked Mr. Colt, in the same quiet, incisive tone. "Mr. Warren has not treated you well, Miss Johnson. For years he has made love to you in private, giving you reasons why his suit should not be openly acknowledged. Finally he induced you to leave the city, on the plea—he looked at her closely—"that it was not safe to remain here; but really to get you out of his way." The expression of the young lady's face during these quiet words was a study to behold. "He kept up a correspondence with you during your absence. And yet all this time he was paying his addresses to another lady. Finally his letters grew few and far between, and at length ceased altogether. You grew uneasy and indignant, and determined to seek your forgetful lover."

During these unlooked-for remarks Alice had paled and flushed, had nervously torn the work in her hands, had moved uneasily in her chair, while her lips opened and her eyes stared with undisguised terror. She could now contain herself no longer.

"How do you know all this?" she exclaimed, in trembling accents. "Why do you come here? Who are you? I will not consent to be questioned in this way by a stranger!"

"But Mr. Colt is not questioning you, Alice," remarked Dorsey. "He is merely relating a few interesting facts. Do keep still. He is nearly done."

"I deny his right," she cried hotly. "I will not stay here to be insulted."

Yet though she had hastily risen she sunk back into her chair under the peculiar look in Mr. Colt's eyes. She could no more keep her gaze from those strange eyes than the bird can escape the paralyzing orbs of the rattlesnake.

"After reaching the city you sought quiet lodgings," continued Mr. Colt, as calmly as if he had not been interrupted. "You had sufficient reasons for keeping out of sight. But you sent a letter to Mr. Warren which quickly brought him here. He was not in a good humor. He blamed you severely for venturing to the city, and insisted on your leaving it immediately."

"How can you know that?" cried the terrified woman. "No one else was present. Has William—Has Mr. Warren, I mean—"

"He has said nothing." Mr. Colt quietly smiled. "I am something of a seer, Miss Johnson. I can tell you more of that interview. There was no whisper of his marriage."

"No! The wretch! The traitor! He dared not speak of his base treachery! He tried to frighten me—to—" She paused and buried her face in her hands. Had she, in her passion, gone too far?

"That was what I was about to say. He declared that *that old affair* was in peril of being revealed, that your presence here endangered you as well as him, and that if you remained no one could answer for the consequences."

She withdrew her hands from her face, and looked at him with a countenance that was livid with fright.

"*That old affair!*" she faltered.

"Yes. You remember. The key. The word. The midnight visit. The papers and jewels." As he spoke his voice lost its quiet calm and grew stern and accusing. "Who was it listened at the door, when the key and the word were given to Dorsey Hamilton? Who stole the key from his room, and delivered it, with the word to William Warren? Who returned the key late at night, and placed the papers and jewels in the desk of the absent man? Who but you, Alice Johnson? And who but you saw him go to prison without speaking, and lived like a hypocrite with his mother for three years afterward, and all for love of this ingrate who has so basely deceived you?"

"No, no!" she cried, starting toward him with a fluttering motion. "No he! I acknowledge! I acknowledge all! But not he!" She halted in the center of the room, a look of sudden energy came into her face, her form proudly stiffened, she

seemed to suddenly perceive that she was being played with and led to confession. "No," she cried, "it is all false! You have set my brain in a whirl with your questions, and I have been talking like a madwoman. What do you mean, sir? I know nothing about key or word, papers or jewels. This is a ridiculous farce, and I refuse to listen any longer, or answer any more questions. Why have you brought this man here, Dorsey Hamilton?"

"Because I am determined to have revenge on the author of my ruin," answered Dorsey sternly. "It is not you, Alice. You were but a tool in the hands of that villain who has led you to crime, and then basely deserted you. Nor is it even William Warren I pursue, but the man who is hid behind him, and who made him his agent in this crime."

Alice looked at him as he spoke with varying face, though the obstinate curl of her lip did not yield. The bird had escaped from the serpent's charm.

"I deny it all," she exclaimed in a hightened voice. "You have laid a trap for me, and got me to talk some wild nonsense. It is all a lie. I know nothing of either key or jewels."

"Then you never saw this ring before?" Mr. Colt had risen and walked toward her. As he spoke he held a diamond ring directly under her eyes.

She gave a faint shriek, and drew back with a shudder, her eyes staring at the ring as if it had been a basilisk.

"That ring!" came from her in a trembling whisper. "That terrible witness from the past!" She held up her hands to shut out the vision of the ring, and of the equally flashing eyes that were bent on her in stern accusation. "I—I remember—Mr. Warren gave—"

"He gave you the jewels to put in Dorsey Hamilton's cabinet," said the detective in his sternest tones. "And this among them. He was not the idiot to leave this witness of his crime in your hands. But you, through your weak love of jewelry, kept this ring back, not dreaming that it would turn up in the future as the agent to reveal the true criminal. Do you perceive to what your weakness has brought you?"

"He missed it!" she trembly said, utterly overcome by this last stroke of fate. "He accused me of keeping it, and demanded it back. I would have returned it, but could not. It had vanished. It was stolen from me. Ah! I have ever since feared that fatal ring! I knew that fate would bring it back again to accuse me and my love—"

"Your love!" repeated the detective, in harsh contempt. "What, that base traitor who led you to crime on the plea of love, and then deserted you for another! Do you doubt his marriage then? Look here. I have not come without evidence of it!"

He held a folded newspaper in his hand, and pointed out to her shrinking eyes an item in the list of marriages.

The tortured woman, who during the last hour had passed through such a score of emotions, now suddenly blazed out into a new phase of passion.

"The liar and villain!" she exclaimed, lifting her hands as if in denunciation. "The false, false traitor! I will have revenge on him! I will have revenge on him! It is all true! Every word you have said! He would not publicly acknowledge our love because he was in business troubles. Then he made me listen for the word and steal the key. All you have said he made me do. The traitor! The traitor! I knew not what I did. I was in terrible fear and remorse. But I loved him so, I loved him so, that I was not myself. He made me stay with Mrs. Hamilton. He made me play the hypocrite. I could well act the kind friend to the poor lady, for I felt that thus I was in part atoning for my crime. Finally he made me leave the city, by declaring that there was danger of a revelation of the crime. He kept me away, the base villain, that he might marry another woman! Oh, why did not Heaven strike us both dead? But I will have my revenge on the traitor! I care not what you do with me! Write down what I say. I will attest to the whole. We shall see if he can play with the heart of Alice Johnson, and then fling it away, like a toy of which he had grown weary!"

Still gesticulating wildly she sunk back in her chair, utterly overcome by the violence of her emotions.

When at length the two men left the house in which this stirring scene had taken place, it was with a look of quiet triumph on the face of the detective, of hopeful assurance on that of his companion.

"How could you venture to offer so many conjectures as facts?" asked Dorsey of his experienced associate. "Suppose you had made a serious error. Would she not have suspected you of guessing, and refused to acknowledge the truth?"

"But I was not guessing," answered Cop, with a quiet smile. "I said nothing that I did not know, or at least that I had positive assurance of."

"But how could you? If you had been in the house yourself, and seen all the woman's move-

ments, you could not have described it more closely."

"Somebody was in the house and saw all her movements," answered the detective.

"Ah! Who? I do not see. Was it John Clark?"

"No."

"Who then?"

"It is a poor bow that has but one string," answered Cop, smilingly. "I had an interview this afternoon with a young woman in prison on the charge of theft, one Bridget Flanagan."

"Bridget? Was it she?"

"She told me a very neat story, on premise that I would use my influence to release her. She looks stupid, Dorsey, but she is not a fool. For instance, she was the only person in your house who suspected Alice Johnson of having a secret lover. She had seen this lover, but did not know his name. On the day of the robbery it was she that admitted Mr. Markham, when he called to deliver you the key. Something in Miss Johnson's movements attracted Bridget's attention, and she watched her. She saw her listening at the door leading to your room from the hall. This roused her espionage. She observed that Miss Johnson left the house about eight o'clock, and did not return till after ten. You were still out. You had left your office coat, with the safe key in it, hanging in your closet."

"Yes, yes. That is true."

"It was easy then, to return the key. Bridget used the keyhole now. She could not tell what was being done, but saw Miss Johnson at your desk, and caught sight of some papers in her hand."

"Good heavens, Mr. Colt!" cried Dorsey, in surprise. "Why, this evidence would have cleared me! Why did the girl conceal it? Alice Johnson had a motive. But Bridget—"

"Had a motive too. She disliked you, for something severe which you had once said to her. And immediately after your arrest your mother discharged her for some impudence. She did not know, indeed, that Miss Johnson's strange movements had anything to do with the robbery. Whatever she may have suspected she kept to herself."

"But there is another point. That concerning the ring. How could you charge her so confidently with retaining it?"

"Because I did not fancy that William Warren was quite an idiot. I knew from Miss Amherst that it was one of the stolen jewels. I suspected John Clark of being concerned in the robbery, from his possession of it. But through the wit of a very sharp young agent of mine I have learned where he got it. From what Miss Johnson says I can see now that Clark must have stolen it from her shortly after the robbery."

"I did not think he was capable of such an act."

"Temptation, my good fellow. Temptation does many strange things. I fancy that remorse for the theft may have had some share in driving him to drink."

"And how came he to retain the ring?"

"He kept it as a nest egg. He pawned it when he needed money, and redeemed it when he received money. That was the way he became so familiar with pawnbrokers. But there is one mystery yet. He accuses some one of driving him to drink, and I am sure some one keeps him supplied with cash. I must find out who that is."

"I thought you suspected Flite."

"Oh, I am all at sea again. The real criminal, he for whom Warren acted as agent, is still out of sight. But I will find him. I will find him. Yet we are not ready to show our hands. We must keep in the dark awhile longer. The weight of evidence yet points to Flite, but so many suspicious affairs have been cleared up that I am sure of nothing. Warren is the sign-post of the deed. By watching him I can not fail to hit the mark."

After some more words they separated, Cop fearing that they might be seen together.

Dorsey went home that night with a lighter heart than he had borne for many a long day.

And before a half-hour had elapsed the sharp eyes of Bilkins were on the house which held Alice Johnson, while his comrade Tom was not far away. They had strict orders not to let her give them the slip, and to closely watch all her visitors.

CHAPTER XVI.

A NEAT HAND AT THE BOOKS.

"WHICH way, Harry? You look as if you had struck a new lead."

"Yes, sent for a piece up-town. Some confidential clerk business, or something of the sort."

These words had passed between Cop Colt and another of the detective corps, whom he had met leaving the police head-quarters.

"Oh, that's the oldest sort of an old song. I'm getting not to take stock in anything less than a bank president or cashier. Small fry don't pay where there are so many big fish a'cat."

"You've handled smaller jobs than this," said Harry, a little nettled. "It's a big wholesale

grocery. Defalcation to the tune of six thousand. Doctored books. And then there's some odd features in the case. The suspected party is an old hand. Not two months out of quod for a job of the same kind."

Cop, who had turned indifferently away, made a quick movement at these words.

"Who is it?" he asked briefly.

"William Warren is the firm name. He accuses his private cash clerk, named Dorsey Hamilton, of robbery. The young fellow has done well. Only a month or so in the situation, and has fingered six thousand already. He is a regular daisy."

A low whistle of surprise came from Cop's lips.

"I told him how it would go," he muttered. "It was a settled thing."

"What's that?" asked Harry sharply. "What are you growling to yourself about?"

"See here, Harry, you won't object to a comrade in this job, eh? I've got nothing on hand this morning, and would like to go along with you."

"Ah! then the affair has grown a little bigger in your eyes?" asked Harry.

"Just so. A good deal bigger."

"Come, Cop, what is up? Let out. Am I sailing across your hawser?"

"You bet, my boy. There are reasons, however, why I must keep mum for the present. I want you to work this job up as it appears to you. But I would like to have my eye on it, for certain reasons of my own. I will tell you very soon, but just now I would rather have you work without any preconceptions. I want to see how the matter will strike an unprejudiced observer."

"What in the thunder are you driving at, anyhow?" growled Harry, in a puzzled tone. "So I'm on the tail end of a mystery. All right, though. Come ahead. I couldn't have better company."

"Give me five minutes," answered Cop. "Warren knows me, and I don't want to be recognized. Let me make a few changes in rig."

He hurried to his room, where he went busily to work changing his dress and appearance. As he did so he kept up a steady conversation to himself.

"This is confounded sudden," he declared. "I'd give something to know what's in the wind. They've taken fright at something or somebody. What is it? Has the young fool been talking? My track is too well covered up. They don't know I am in the case, unless Dorsey has set his tongue wagging. And I don't believe he has. Miss Johnson has not moved. So nothing has come out from her. There is only one point I can see. Flite knows of the loss of that diamond ring by John Clark. He is a suspicious dog. That may have worked on his nerves, and set him to spring the trap. The stealing of the ring is enough to show any sharp man that there is some underhand game at work. Do they fancy that Hamilton is on the trail, and want to get rid of him? It looks decidedly that way. I only hope he has had wit enough to take my advice, and not put himself in a hole. But he is not wide-awake enough for an old 'coon like Warren. I bet a fig they've got him tied up in six fathom of rope."

Cop had become a decided "man about town." He was dressed in a foppish rig, with stunning neck-tie, the slenderest of canes, and a well-waxed mustache which decidedly changed the appearance of his face. Some skillful touches of paint, here and there, had aided in giving him a new countenance.

"Well," cried Harry with interest. "I will say that for a quick transformation, my boy, there isn't your equal in the States. Whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"Mr. George Gordon, a 'prentice hand at the business. Very good, however, at working up outside trails, if a sharp scout is wanted."

He said this in an affected tone, very different from his usual manner.

"I see," laughed Harry. "I shall take pleasure in recommending you to Mr. Warren, as a terrier of very sharp scent. But come, we are losing time."

A half-hour afterward found them in Mr. Warren's store. It was a large establishment, well-filled with goods, and busy with the bluster of an active business. They found the proprietor alone in his private office, engaged over some books, at his high desk.

He looked inquisitively at his visitors. Harry handed him a card.

"Ah, yes. You are the detective I sent for. And this gentleman?"

"Is from my office. His services may be needed."

"Yes, yes. Pray be seated. Glad you came so promptly. I have been victimized, gentlemen." He spoke with a jerky, nervous accent.

"So I understand. You suspect some one? Your private clerk?"

"Exactly. I more than suspect. Had him arrested and taken off half an hour ago."

"The deuce you did! Then what do you want with me? That's a sweet way to help a detective in his work."

Cop gave a slight whistle, and fixed his eyes upon the ceiling.

"Ah! Can I have been too hasty? The fact is I fancied my man was growing suspicious. I feared he might give me the slip."

A look passed between the two detectives.

"Mr. Warren may be right," said Cop. "The evidence may be satisfactory already."

"Why, yes, it is. I thought it only regular to have a gentleman from your office, but really the thing is transparent. You will have little trouble."

"Let me hear the case," asked Harry, leaning back easily in his chair.

Mr. Warren took a seat on the high stool at his desk, facing the two quiet detectives. In all appearance it looked as if they were engaged in very ordinary business. Harry seemed easy and indifferent. Cop sat twirling the ends of his mustache, and playing with his cane. About the grocer, however, there was a slight trace of nervousness, which did not escape the eyes that so quietly observed him.

"I presume I do not need to tell you who my clerk is," began Mr. Warren. "You must know the record of Dorsey Hamilton."

Harry nodded.

"We thought you remarkably fresh at our office, when we heard that you had engaged him," he answered.

"I considered that the man ought to have a square chance," resumed Warren. "Because a man has gone wrong once it is no reason why he should be hounded like a fox. It is my theory that such men can often be trusted better than untried ones. And what's more one needn't be ashamed to watch them."

"So then you gave Hamilton a responsible position, but kept a watch on him?"

"Exactly. I wanted to act generously, but I didn't engage to play the fool. The man deserved to have a chance."

"Wasn't it a little risky in giving him cash to handle at the start?" asked Harry, innocently.

"Whole hog or none, is my motto," answered Warren, swinging easily on his rotary stool. "If there is something to find out I don't believe in mincing matters. So I gave him charge of my private cash account. It is a rather heavy one, gentlemen. There are investments, speculative and otherwise. I keep the pennies moving, you see. Here is the cash-book that Hamilton kept." He struck his hand on a large, leather-bound account-book on the desk. "And here is my private detective."

With a cunning smile he drew from his pocket a thick diary, whose pages he opened and showed that it was full of entries.

"I have here a duplicate record of all the important transactions for the past month," he remarked. "Merely as a check on my clerk. Yesterday I discovered, on making up my accounts, that there was a discrepancy in the cash balance. Last night I compared these entries with those in Hamilton's book. To my surprise and horrors, sirs, I discovered some astounding discrepancies. Many of his figures were outrageously wrong. In a very hasty examination I discovered full six thousand dollars amiss."

"You must deal heavily if you can drop six thousand monthly into the waste basket, without discovering it."

"Yes, I have had some big operations within a month. I would have found it out, of course, on striking my balance. But my sly-fingered clerk might have slipped before that. I think it a streak of luck that I nabbed him in time. See here, gentlemen."

He opened the cash-box and pointed out several entries that had been marked with pencil. Opening his diary he showed the corresponding entries. There was evident a considerable difference in the figures.

"See here—and here."

He rapidly turned the leaves of the two books, pointing out item after item. The figures were far from agreeing.

"It is very plain," said Harry, turning away, while Cop continued to examine the book. "You can authenticate the entries in your diary."

"Certainly. I can prove them by my brokers."

"Are you sure of that? He may have made his deals agree with his figures."

"Not much. I didn't go it quite blind."

"Who were your brokers?"

"I have dealt with several parties, mainly with Benton & Co."

"Under the circumstances I hardly see what you want with me," said Harry, a little testily. "A detective with nothing to detect is a mere figure-head."

"The money is missing," exclaimed Warren quickly. "Where is it? It may be among his effects, and it may not. I have the thief, but I want the money."

"Ah, I see. Then a search is necessary."

"To begin with, yes."

"There is one thing I notice here," said Cop, turning from his examination of the book. "All the false entries seem to be in deals through Benton & Co. There are none with other firms."

"That is a main point in my case," replied Warren quickly. "That is the firm with which

Hamilton dealt directly. I managed the deals with the other brokers."

"I see. Where did Hamilton work?"

"In this office. He kept all my private accounts. I keep those separate from the store business."

"Was he alone?"

"Usually. One of the other clerks worked in here occasionally."

"I should like to see that clerk."

Mr. Warren left the office, the two detectives remaining.

"What do you think?" asked Harry hastily.

"Is it a set-up job?"

"Yes," answered Cop. "But it is a little too well set up. This chap is a regular fox, and it looks as if Hamilton was in a scrape. Confound him, I warned him to be on the lookout for snags."

"Ha! Then you have had dealings with Hamilton?"

"You bet. And I have our friend Warren by the nose, too. Yet I must say I don't like the look of this affair."

"Something may be found out," remarked Harry. "We must make the most of the search for the money. And points may be got from those brokers."

Cop shook his head.

"The men that put up this job put up another that has given me an ocean of trouble, and that I don't see through yet. They are too sharp to forget anything. You will find that the net has been well laid, and that every step you take, will bring in new evidence against the accused man. Hang me, if I don't admire these fellows! You will be convinced, perhaps. I will too. I think it best we should be both convinced. To shut your eyes is sometimes the best way to see clearly."

"Good. But hush. Here comes Warren and his man."

Further words were prevented by the entrance of the merchant and his clerk, a middle-aged person who looked rather worried and flustered. In fact the arrest of one of their associates had made a sensation in the store that morning.

He answered Harry's few questions, however, intelligently. Nothing was elicited. It was clear that he had seen nothing suspicious.

"Where does Mr. Hamilton live?"

"On Spring Garden street," answered the merchant.

"Is it likely that any knowledge of the robbery could have reached there?"

"No."

"Or did Hamilton have any idea of your intentions before his arrest?"

"No. I kept very quiet."

"Then the money may be concealed at his residence. An immediate search is important. Mr. Gordon and I will conduct it. Do you wish to be present?"

"I should prefer."

"Very well. We will go at once."

While Warren sought the closet for his street coat Harry whispered to his fellow officer.

"Anything shady?"

"Think so. Not sure. I smell something."

"I don't then. But you had the scent before, and know where and how to use your nose."

Mr. Warren now joined them, and they left the store in company.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CONTENTS OF A SECRET DRAWER.

"THERE seems to be nothing here."

These words were spoken by Harry Fay, the detective, in the apartment of Dorsey Hamilton. A thorough search had been made of the room, and particularly of the desk of the accused man, but without success. No trace of the supposed stolen money, or of incriminating papers of any kind, had been discovered.

"It looks that way," remarked Cop, quietly.

"There must be something, somewhere," declared Mr. Warren, who had accompanied them. "There is no doubt of the operation, and he is not the man to throw away the money."

"Perhaps he has the record or the cash about him."

"No, no. He has been searched. It must be somewhere in this room, or in this house. Let us search again. Something may have been overlooked."

"Very well," said Harry, shrugging his shoulders. He was not in the habit of overlooking things.

He resumed the search, however, Mr. Warren aiding him. As for Colt he had taken a chair, and sat playing with his cane. Yet there was not a movement or tone of voice that escaped him.

"Quite likely there is some secret drawer or cavity about this desk," remarked Warren, poking here and there with his finger. "It is full of pigeon-holes, and these often conceal some such secret hiding-place."

"Ah!" he resumed, tapping with his fingernail. "That spot sounds hollow. Try here, Mr. Fay. This is not all solid wood."

The detective examined the spot thus pointed out to him. It was the bottom of one of the pigeon-holes.

"It has a hollow sound," he remarked. "Yet

it seems built in solidly. There is no give in the wood, and no sign of any spring or fastening."

"Let me examine," said Warren. "I am a little used to that sort of thing. I know all the tricks of these secret drawers."

After a few minutes' fumbling he inserted his finger in the adjoining cavity, and touched something that gave a slight click. Instantly the suspected board shot sidewise in the grooves that held it, slipping half into the next opening, and revealing a narrow, dark space behind it.

"Ha! Do you see that? I thought so," exclaimed the grocer, in a tone of triumph. "You gentlemen can be shown a thing or two yet. I leave the rest to you, Mr. Fay."

The detective, with an air of vexation, thrust the sliding-board that formed the back of the cavity further along, opening a wide space, into which he thrust his fingers. In a moment they emerged, holding a small, leather-bound pass-book.

During all this time Cop had sat in silence, no part of him moving but his eyes.

"A prize! A prize!" cried Mr. Warren, in some delight. "Try again. There must be some cash there."

"This is all," answered Harry calmly. "Let us see what we have here." He opened the book and glanced at its pages. "It seems to be a bank-book," he remarked. "With Benton & Co., eh? Why, that is the party with whom the false deals were made."

"The impudence of the rascal!" cried Warren, breaking into a sudden rage. "To rob me through that firm, and then to have the assurance to bank with them! There is one prime thing in it, though. The money is where I can lay hands on it."

"It is a little singular," remarked Harry. "Look at that, my boy."

He handed Cop the book. The latter ran his eyes quickly over its pages.

"All the entries inside a month," he said. "And so far as I can remember they seem to agree in amount with the surplus charges in the cash-book. What is the total?" He ran his eye quickly down the column. "Somewhere about six thousand. Well, it certainly looks squarely for your confidential clerk, Mr. Warren."

"He is a rascal! A villain!" exclaimed the grocer, with seeming increase of rage. "After my trusting him, and giving him the chance to recover his lost ground. For him to victimize me! And to begin at once. He couldn't wait even a month. I know the villain's scheme. He wanted to fill his pocket, and then strike out for some place where he is not known as a jailbird. But he has overreached himself, gentlemen. I'll pinch him. I'll pinch him till he howls."

"There is nothing more to be done here," said Harry quietly. "Let us return to your office, Mr. Warren. I would like to compare these entries with those in the doctored cash-book. I must also see Benton & Co., and find if this account is correct. We must test our ground."

"Yes. That is the idea," answered Warren, in quick agreement. "I want the thief to have full justice. I only want to do the square thing."

They left the house together. Mr. Warren went first. Harry managed to hang back a step and whisper to his comrade.

"Well?" he queried.

"A good hider is a good finder," rejoined Colt.

"Then you think?"

"Nothing. Find out who compose the firm of Benton & Co., and all about them."

A knowing nod was Harry's answer.

"You will excuse me," remarked Cop, after they had gone a few steps further. "I am not wanted just now in this affair, and I have a little matter of business on hand. If you need me again, Mr. Fay, you can leave word at the office."

"Oh, very well. We can do without you now.—What's in the wind?" he whispered.

"I want to console the widow," rejoined Cop in the same tone, with a knowing wink. "Good-day, Mr. Warren."

"Good-day." Colt walked back, twirling his cane in the true dandy style. In a minute or two he turned into the street he had just left, and proceeded to Mrs. Hamilton's house, his face now growing very serious.

The poor woman looked twenty years older. Her eyes were red with weeping. The visit of the detectives had given her the first knowledge of her son's arrest, on a new charge of theft.

Cop seated himself before her, with a look of pity.

"Don't let this affair trouble you, Mrs. Hamilton," he said quietly. "Take my word for it that it is not so bad as it looks."

"I cannot bear the thought of it," she cried passionately. "My poor boy is in prison again. And I know that he is innocent! I know that he is innocent!"

"You are right, madam. He is innocent. And I am his friend. Trust to me to prove his innocence, and confound his enemies."

"Oh, can you, sir? Can you? You will have

the blessings of the mother and the widow!" She clasped his hand and pressed it with fervor.

"Listen to me," he answered. "I am a stranger to you, but I am your son's friend. I am the detective whom he has engaged to discover his enemies. Now one word, Mrs. Hamilton. This present affair looks dark against your son. It will look darker yet, for the scheme against him has been cunningly laid. But I beg you not to be troubled. All is going well. No man can lay a plot like this without leaving some loophole through which the truth may creep out. The other affair is yet somewhat a mystery to me. This one may reveal the missing links of evidence. Promise me that you will not let it distress you. Take my word for it that your son shall be cleared, and his foes punished."

"Oh, sir, can I—can I trust you in this? My heart is almost broken!"

"Yes, yes. You can trust me fully. And now to business, Mrs. Hamilton. I have a question or two to ask you."

She drew back in some alarm.

"Questions, sir?"

"Very innocent ones. You may help to put me on the right track. In the first place, has your son kept regular hours? Was he out much in the evening?"

"Scarcely at all. He has hardly ever gone out after business hours."

"Has he had much company at the house?"

"Very little. One queer old person, who says he came from California, is almost the only one."

Cop smiled quietly. He happened to know who that queer old person was.

"One more question, Mrs. Hamilton. Did any one call on him yesterday, or last night?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Certainly I am. Dorsey spent the evening with me, in the sitting-room."

"The evening before, then?"

"He was out the evening before. A person did call, it is true. But it was one of the family. He asked to see Dorsey, and left when he found he was out."

"One of the family?"

"Yes. It was Dorsey's cousin, John Clark. He used to live with us, but I have not seen him for a long time. He has become very dissipated."

Colt gave a slight start. John Clark? The game was opening again.

"Who admitted Mr. Clark?" he quietly asked.

"I did."

"And received him where?"

"In my ordinary sitting-room. On the second floor back."

"Did he stay long?"

"Not more than ten minutes. He came shortly after Dorsey had gone out, and I couldn't get him to wait till he came back."

"What did he want?"

"Why, nothing, sir. Just to see him, that is all. He had not seen Dorsey since his release from prison. He was ashamed, sir. But he has reformed. I was much gratified to see how well dressed and respectable he seemed. I always liked John, and I have been very much tried by his bad behavior."

"He staid ten minutes. Did you let him out?"

"I wanted to, but he laughed at the idea. He wouldn't let me stir. He said it was odd if he couldn't find his way through the house, without troubling his old aunt to guide him."

"He seems to have known the way well," muttered Colt.

"Sir?"

"Nothing. Then he went out alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear him go down-stairs?"

"No. But I was not listening. I heard the door close, however, and it seemed to me that he could not remember the house so well after all, for he seemed to be a good while in reaching the door." She laughed slightly.

"Ah!" said Cop with interest. "How long?"

A minute?"

"Yes. Two minutes. It ought not to have taken a minute to reach the door."

"Very true. Then Mr. Clark was the only caller?"

"Yes, sir."

"That will do, Mrs. Hamilton. I hope you will not let this affair trouble you. Take my word for it that your son's fair fame shall be vindicated. But do not speak of this. You had better seem to be in grief."

"I cannot act otherwise, sir. I am in grief."

"So much the better. Good-day, madam. Trust in me."

Cop swung his cane with a lighter twirl than ever, on reaching the street.

"Jack Clark, eh? So he's in this? If he didn't put that book in the desk, I'm a sinner! Warren knew the trick of the secret drawer considerably too well, and Clark is the man who taught him. He is the only one who would be likely to know the make-up of the desk. Wore fine clothes, did he? Looks decidedly as if he had found an angel. By Jupiter, business is crowding on me with a vengeance. And there's no time to lose. I've got to interview Dorsey. Clark must be watched. I can trust Harry Fay to rake out that Benton & Co. in-

trigue, but I have a little investigation to wind up in Warren's private office. And with it all I've got only one pair of eyes. Let me see. That Alice Johnson business has grown less important. All I want now is to keep her from leaving the city. Tom will serve for that. Bilkins can be spared. I must put Bilkins on Clark, for the present."

No sooner said than done. He hurried up-town to the locality of Miss Johnson's residence. All was quiet about here. He had some trouble at first in finding his two spies, but discovered them at length in front of a cigar store at some distance up the street. They had opened a trade with the cigar-vendor, and made his shop a convenient lookout spot.

Cop passed them, with a most self-important step, and an easy play of his cane. They looked at him sharply, yet with no show of recognition.

He turned smiling, and made a peculiar sign, which brought them to his side in a second.

"You didn't know me, eh?" he asked.

"Couldn't," answered Bilkins. "It wasn't on the cards."

"You didn't, you rascal. Come, Bilkins, I have another job for you. You stay here, Tom. Just see that she does not leave the city. The rest is off."

"All solid," answered Tom.

The detective and his young spy walked away, leaving the older scout still on duty.

In an hour afterward Bilkins was working up the lunch route of John Clark, in search of that interesting individual. Cop had called at his office, made some desirable changes in his get-up, and was on his way in a street car toward the lower portion of the city.

His rakish mustache had disappeared, and his whole manner had grown quiet and sedate. From the blue bag he carried he might have passed for a lawyer's clerk. He left the car in front of a massive stone building, of Egyptian architecture, well down town.

It was, indeed, Moyamensing Prison, the well-known county jail of the city of Philadelphia.

A ring at the wicket beside the great iron doors quickly brought a warden to the gate. Cop said nothing, but quietly handed him a card.

"Warner and Perkins. Very well, sir. Who is your client?"

"A new man. Just brought in this morning. One Dorsey Hamilton."

"Yes. We have that name."

He made way and the seeming lawyer's clerk entered. A little inquiry inside the prison gained him admission to the cell of the new prisoner.

As representative of the prisoner's counsel Cop was at once admitted to the cell, the door being closed behind him.

Dorsey sat in a very disconsolate attitude, his head buried in his hands. He hardly looked up to observe this visitor. He seemed in deep depression.

"You do not know me?" asked Cop quietly.

"No," Dorsey looked up again. "Ah! it is Mr. Colt!" He had recognized Cop's peculiar smile.

"Yes. And now get up and shake yourself. Try and work some life into your bones. Why, man, one might think the skies had fallen."

"They have, for me," answered Dorsey disconsolately. "Luck is dead against me. What made me go to that place? I might have known. And to be caught thus, after your warning! You must think me a fool."

"Well, not exactly that; but an innocent youth, that is not fit to deal with rascals. But keep up your spirits. All is not lost yet, by a jug-full. If I am not sorely mistaken this is the best thing that could happen. It opens some doors that I could not see my way through."

"Then you think—"

"That you needn't despair. Trust me to pull you through, old fellow. These are sharp rascals, but Cop Colt is no baby at this business."

"It is not that which troubles me," said Dorsey disconsolately. "Miss Amberly, what will she think? She must despise me utterly now."

"Let her. We will cure her of that. I would tell her what's in the wind, but it is best to keep shady for the present. And now spruce yourself up. I am here to cross-question you."

"Very well. But I know nothing to begin with. It is all a mystery to me."

"Then you did not keep a private bank account with Benton & Co?"

"Benton & Co? What do you mean?"

"Simply that you banked your stolen funds with them. There is no doubt about that. Your bank book has been found in a secret drawer in your desk."

"My bank book?" Dorsey's eyes were wide open in astonishment. "You are talking in riddles. I had no bank book and no bank account."

"One thing. You did not spend Tuesday evening at home?"

"No. I was out visiting."

"Did you observe anything changed in the appearance of your room on your return?"

"No.—Let me see.—Yes. My desk, which I had left closed, was open when I returned. That is all. Do you draw anything from that?"

"Did anybody know the trick of that secret drawer?"

"Oh, yes. Mother did. And— Let me think. No one else, except John Clark. I remember showing it to him once."

"Very good," said Cop, with a smile of satisfaction. "That is an excellent point. Now listen. I have a tale for your ears."

When he left the cell, a half-hour afterward, Dorsey understood much better the nature of the net into which he had fallen. And his face wore a far more hopeful expression than that which the detective had found on it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SCRAP OF PAPER.

"Yes, sir. The gentleman keeps an account with us. That is his bank book. By the way, there is a whisper on the street of some trouble he has got into. Is there anything in it, sir?"

"Yes. He is accused of defalcation. It is claimed that the cash he has deposited with you was stolen from his employer."

So Harry Fay answered the receiving teller of Benton & Co., whom he had been questioning.

"Good gracious, you don't tell me that? Why I know Hamilton, and thought him a reformed man. But bad blood will out, they say."

"Do you receive general deposits?"

"Not as a rule. But several of our customers deposit with us. It is not our regular line, but we do it for accommodation."

"And Hamilton made such an arrangement with you?"

"I presume so. I have never known Mr. Hamilton in the business. All his deposits have been made by another party—a friend or agent of his."

"Ah! who was that party?"

"I don't know his name."

"What sort of a man?"

"A stoutish person, rather dissipated looking. None too well dressed."

"And he is the only one you have known in the business?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Hamilton's arrangement must have been made with one of the firm. Mr. Benton is in. Do you wish to see him?"

"Yes. Will you please inform him? Here is my card."

Within a few minutes the detective was introduced to the private office of Mr. Benton, stock and note broker.

He found a handsome, portly, very polite individual, who was quite willing to answer questions, on learning the object of his visitor.

But his information was at zero point. He knew that Mr. Warren's speculative ventures with his house had been lately managed by his confidential clerk, but knew nothing of this person, and was quite astonished at what he now heard.

"The deposit must have been arranged with my partner, Mr. Merry. He looks after matters of that kind."

"Can I see Mr. Merry?"

"Not for a week or two. He has gone West, on some private business. He may be back in a week. It is very uncertain."

"That is unlucky. But this is your bank book? These entries are in the hand of your receiving teller?"

"Yes. There is no doubt of that."

"Then this money is here?"

"I will see. It may have been drawn out."

He went out to the bookkeeper, and made a quick examination.

"It is all straight," he remarked on returning. "We have six thousand one hundred and fifty eight dollars in bank on Mr. Dorsey Hamilton's account."

"Which is claimed by William Warren to be money stolen from him."

"He will have to establish that claim before he can touch this money." Mr. Benton drew himself up stiffly. "It is subject to Mr. Hamilton's check until stopped by order of the court. And Mr. Warren cannot touch it except under a court decision. We only know our depositors, sir."

"Very good. I think you are quite right. And I am much obliged for your courtesy."

"Not at all. Not at all. Business is business, sir. I am open and above-board in all my dealings. I have no mysteries to conceal, Mr. Fay."

He bowed the detective from his office

with old-fashioned politeness. Harry shook his head on regaining the street.

"I am not so sure of that, my dear sir. You are a little too anxious to seem open and above-board. You bluff, frank people sometimes hide the devil in a milk-kettle. I must ask further about Benton."

It was easy to obtain information on this point. He was acquainted with some of the members of another firm of brokers, whom he proceeded to investigate.

It appeared that Benton & Co. had been in business about five years. Before that time the members of the firm had been employed in other houses. Mr. Benton with Markham & Co., Mr. Merry with the Drexel house. They had opened business on a very small capital, but had done remarkably well.

"In fact," said the informant, "we have often had the idea that there must be more money behind them than appears. They have branched out too broadly for slender pockets."

"Ah! A secret partner, for instance?"

"That has been my idea."

"But have you any evidence of it?"

"No. Only it is not easy to make a pint mug do duty for a quart measure. I fancy that somebody has put in and drawn out, and that a big slice of the Benton profits go into some other pocket."

"Do you think the Drexels have backed them?"

"I know nothing about that. May be it is some of the firm of Markham & Co. I am told that Mr. Flite appears to have a good deal of private business with them. But nobody knows anything. Our good friends have been wise enough to keep their business to themselves."

"Oh! Yet Mr. Benton declares that he is open and above board in all his business. He has no mysteries to conceal."

The other gentleman laughed.

"Don't put your finger too deep in Mr. Benton's mouth, if you don't want it bit," he said.

Harry Fay rubbed his hands on regaining the street.

"I must unload my budget to Cop Colt," he remarked to himself. "It looks decidedly as if there was a rat-hole somewhere about here. And I fancy that Cop knows the rats."

Within an hour afterward he was as good as his word. Cop listened quietly to the recital given him, his face retaining its placid expression.

"So Flite has private business with them?"

"Is Flite one of your rats?" asked Harry, quickly.

"If I am not mistaken, he is the king of the rats. There's a confoundedly deep-laid scheme here, Harry. One of the best managed I have ever come across. Yet there was never a floor without one weak plank. And the weak spot here is the dissipated fellow that made these deposits in Hamilton's name."

He opened the bank book as he spoke, and continued to carelessly open and shut the leaves as he proceeded.

"Do you know him?"

"As well as I know you."

"See here, Cop, let me into this," demanded Harry. "You have made me deuced curious. And it seems to me that we are partners in the same game now."

"Very true, Harry. It will help you to give you an eye-opener in the business. Well, I don't mind telling you what I have been doing."

As he spoke he gave an extra twirl to the leaves of the bank book. There fluttered out of them a thin scrap of paper, so light that it floated to the other side of the room.

To an ordinary person this would have seemed a mere stray fragment, such as might slip in between the leaves of any book. But everything has a possible value to the eyes of a detective. Cop began his story, but at the same time he rose and sauntered across the room for the floating slip. He evidently thought it unimportant, but worth looking at.

He picked it up and returned to his seat, continuing his narration.

It was a very thin and much crumpled fragment, as if it had been crushed between the fingers. He smoothed it out carelessly as he talked, and cast his eyes on it with an indifferent gaze.

But suddenly he paused in his narration, his eyes assumed a look of intense interest, and fixed themselves earnestly on the paper, which revealed a single line of writing.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, striking his knee with his open hand.

"Hillo!" cried Harry. "What's up now?"

"The biggest thing I ever saw in such a small shape," declared Cop excitedly. "If I am not mistaken, Harry, I hold here the key to a deep mystery."

Harry was too impatient with curiosity to wait any longer. He snatched the slip from the fingers of his companion, and quickly read its single line of writing. This ran as follows:

"Spring the trap."

O."

"Spring the trap? What do you make out of this?"

Cop had now partly recovered from his unusual excitement.

"Wait till I finish my story. Then you will understand better. You can testify that that slip of paper came from the bank book?"

"Yes. I saw it drop out."

"Very well."

Cop went on with the description of what he had done in the Hamilton imprisonment case, and what discoveries he had made. Harry listened with great interest.

"It is a very neatly concocted scheme," he said at the end. "I doubt if there is a man on the fence that could have worked it up as you have done. The point I have made to-day adds to the suspicions against Flite. You think this arrest is part of the same plot?"

"I am sure of it."

"Why? What had they to gain by it?"

"They have discovered that Hamilton has an investigation afloat, and that we are on their track. And they think that this arrest will silence him effectually."

"Then you have been treading closely on their heels?"

"So it looks. They have Pinkerton spies on us, and may have smelt a rat."

"Why not go for Flite? Confront him with Warren and the others."

Cop shook his head. He picked up the slip of paper and again examined it.

"Doris y Hamilton never wrote this."

"Who did?"

"That is to find out. It is a masked hand. And the initial O means something."

"That may be a blind."

"Very true."

"But what do you make of it? You have some theory."

"Yes. And you?"

"Go on; I'll see if our theories agree."

"Then this is my line of argument. This bank account is a rascally trick to get Dorsey Hamilton back into prison, and it has been played in this way. He was shadowed as soon as he was released from jail, and was seen to call on me. That gave the rogue who is working this game a start. He scented danger and prepared for it. Dorsey was given a position of trust by a charitable individual—one of the sort who like to give every man a chance. He was at once sent out to do financial business for his employer, who cautiously kept a private check record of all his important operations. This bank account in Hamilton's name was opened at the same time, the deposits being made by an agent of the secret villain. That agent was John Clark, Dorsey's precious cousin."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes; I have had him tracked to Benton & Co.'s place. I now know his errand there. Well, the plot was laid, and the mouse-catcher had his game well in the trap. Whoever he is, it is evident that Benton & Co. are his puppets, and ready to move as he pulls the strings. That is to say, he is the man who supplied their capital. So far, good. But something has happened to satisfy this mysterious individual that Dorsey Hamilton is not a safe man to run afoot."

"That is clear."

"What does he do then? William Warren received, by a safe channel, a slip of paper containing the very innocent words, 'Spring the trap!' Immediately the trap is sprung, and the unwise mouse fairly caught."

"Yes, yes; I see. But how came this bit of paper in the bank book?"

"Who knows?" Cop shrugged his shoulders. "It may be by one of those queer accidents that are always happening. Did you ever drop any small thing in your life, and find it within ten feet of where it fell? Suppose he had this bank book open before him when he was reading the slip. He naturally grows flustered, and crushes the paper between his fingers. He holds it thus, carelessly, while thinking of the dangerous work before him. The paper slips unnoticed from his nervous grasp. On missing it, he drops the book on the desk and commences a strict search for the floating scrap. It is nowhere to be found. He gives up the search after a while, fancying that the light fragment had vanished into some crevice where it will never be discovered. It never strikes him that it may have fallen between the open leaves of the bank book, and be safely concealed within its folds. This is one of the events, Harry, that we call providential."

"Yes," said Harry, doubtfully. "But it is only a theory, remember."

"Just so. But I thoroughly believe it. But to go on. The trap is sprung according to orders. That is, certain entries are changed in Hamilton's cash-book, so as to make discrepancies appear, in accordance with the bank deposits. This took place last night, at Warren's office. Night before last John Clark called on Dorsey Hamilton. Finding him to be out, as he well knew in advance, he bade Mrs. Hamilton good-night, in the sitting-room, and started for the front door alone. But in doing so he wasted just one minute in entering a room at the head of the stairs, darting to a certain desk, opening a hidden drawer whose secret he knew, and depositing therein the doctored bank book. He left so hastily after this nimble proceeding that he forgot to shut the desk behind him."

"Very neatly argued, Cop," answered his fellow-detective, with some admiration. "But unfortunately for your case, the most of it is not evidence."

"I know that. I know that they have worked their game shrewdly, and that the evidence, as it will appear in court, is good to give Hamilton another six years in Cherry Hill. Yet he won't go there, Harry."

"No."

"The game has gone wrong at one vital point. This slip of paper that dropped so awkwardly into the bank book. First, I have to find out whose handwriting this is. It was not intended for any other eyes than those of one person, and therefore is not disguised. It would mean nothing, anyhow, you see, if it hadn't so strangely dropped where it did. Picked up on the floor or in a waste basket, it would have told nothing. In Dorsey Hamilton's bank book it has an ocean of meaning. It is the strongest link in our chain."

"Good. And what next?"

"The cash-book was manipulated last night. That is part of my theory."

"Can you prove it?"

"I can try. But you must send George Gordon to William Warren's office to complete the investigation. There is a little point to be made there, if I am not sadly mistaken."

"George Gordon has orders to that effect," answered Harry, with a smile.

"There is one other matter of importance—that concerning John Clark. I have paid slight attention to him lately, fancying that he was not mixed in this matter. It was a mistake. But I have now one of our sharpest spies on his track."

He was interrupted by the entrance of Bilkins, who seemed somewhat excited.

"I have found him," he said. "But he is making preparations to leave the city. Going West, he says, with a full pocket."

"Aha! Shipped off, eh? That is promising. They are done with him, then, and want him out of the way."

"What shall I do?"

"Watch him like a hawk. Report to me instantly all movements. Find out how and when he intends to go."

Bilkins nodded and withdrew. The two detectives looked at one another.

"Well," asked Harry, "what conclusion? Is Flite your man, and dread of discovery of the plot the cause of this last move?"

"I thought so. But I begin to see the

marks of other fingers in the pie. Are you with me, Harry, if I need help?"

"Hand and glove."

"Between me and you, then, I fancy our man is approaching the end of his rope."

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW CLARE AMBERLY RECEIVED THE NEWS.

It was the morning after the date of the events just narrated. In the reception-room of Miss Amberly three persons were seated, that lady herself, Mr. Flite, and Mr. Osborn.

Clare Amberly seemed in a peculiar frame of mind. There was all the haughtiness of her proud soul in her demeanor. Yet under this outward show traces of a deep gloom and depression were manifest. She seemed seeking to hide some secret cause of trouble under that look of unyielding pride.

Of her two visitors Mr. Flite wore the hard, sour expression which had become the natural habit of his face, while Osborn was all politeness and pliancy.

"It is odd that we always strike on that subject," said Osborn softly. "Somehow this man Hamilton forces himself in on our conversation."

"I don't see anything very odd in that," answered Flite, in his cold accents. "Half the city is talking of him this morning. Some people even are pretending to be surprised. I wasn't fooled for a minute. I knew when Warren was idiot enough to give him that position what the end must be."

"Are you not too hasty to condemn?" asked Clare, with a show of spirit. "You might at least give the gentleman the benefit of a doubt."

"There is no opening for doubt," answered Flite. "And I do not call a thief a gentleman. Excuse me, Miss Amberly, but I have an awkward fashion of giving things their right names."

"You might show some shadow of human sympathy, anyhow," rejoined Osborn, with some resentment. "I don't like the fashion of kicking a man the instant he begins to fall."

Clare turned on him a look of gratitude.

"Begins to fall? It strikes me he is ending his fall. He began five or six years ago. I fear you must think me hard, Miss Amberly, but I have no sympathy with thieves, and I can never profess what I do not believe."

"Is he a thief?" asked Clare, turning to Mr. Osborn. "That is a harsh sentence on very slender grounds. I have closely read the newspaper accounts, and it seems to me that there is abundant room for doubt."

"The newspapers? Oh, they haven't half the story. Osborn can tell you that the most serious points have been kept from the papers."

"That is true," answered Osborn, sorrowfully. "I can't help feeling some pity for poor Hamilton, for he had some good in him. But things do certainly look black. Yet, of course, circumstantial evidence is always open to doubt."

Clare's face grew sterner and prouder still. Was she trying to hide deep emotions which were overwhelming her mind? She looked questioningly from one to the other of the gentlemen, yet made no reply.

"Open to doubt?" cried Flite, with hard opposition. "Come, Osborn, I thought you were more a man of business than that. Is there any doubt about those raised entries? But suppose we drop the subject. We are troubling Miss Amberly with a silly dispute in which she can have no interest."

"No, no! Go on. Of course I have interest in it. Everybody has interest in it."

Her eyes were fixed with almost a beseeching look on Osborn's face. She sat upright in her chair, grasping its arms firmly with both hands. Osborn looked at her with a show of surprise at her excited tone.

"I have not seen the book," he briefly answered. "I cannot answer for what I have not seen."

"It was shown in the magistrate's office. Do you suppose it would have passed muster there if it had been irregular?"

"Hardly. And yet it is possible that there may have been some error. Warren's pocket account book needs to be proved."

Flite shook his head, with a contemptuous laugh.

"Warren has been a fool, I admit. And

I will say further that he is a man I detest. But it is ridiculous to suppose that he has played the knave in this business. What had he to gain? He can have no enmity to a man whom he had just given a position out of sheer benevolence. And there is the matter of the bank book. What have you to say to that? Can you explain that away?" He asked these questions in a tone of triumph.

"The bank book?" exclaimed Clare, in a tone of alarm and wonder. "What is that? The bank book! There has been nothing said about a bank book." Her voice had in it a ring almost of terror.

Osborn looked at her with eyes that seemed full of pity.

"No, Miss Amberly," he replied. "That matter has been kept quiet as yet, though it has come out on the street. I am sorry, as I know you had a certain sympathy with Hamilton in the other affair, and a doubt of his guilt. I honor you for it, too. I could not help in part agreeing with you, though of course we business men are all compelled to weigh the force of evidence. I am very sorry this affair has happened. Hamilton might, by hard and honest work, have regained some standing in the community."

She listened to him with a mingled impatience and gratitude.

"But you say nothing about the bank book. Is it then so overwhelming? Let me hear about it."

"You tell the story, Flite. I don't like to talk about the matter."

"Had we not better proceed with the business that brought us here, Miss Amberly?"

"No, sir. Do you suppose I am a woman and have no curiosity?" She forced a laugh. "I demand that story of the bank book."

"Well, then," answered Flite, a little testily, "it is this: It seems that Hamilton had the impudence to open a bank account with the stolen funds, and with the very firm through which Warren did his principal speculative business. The bank book was found in a secret drawer in his desk."

"At the store?"

"No, at his house. The entries closely agree with the raised figures in the cash-book. And Messrs. Benton & Co. confirm the story. The accused man has deposited over six thousand dollars with them inside a month. Not bad savings out of a monthly salary of one hundred dollars." He laughed sourly. "There is no question about it, Miss Amberly. Dorsey Hamilton is a convicted thief."

Clare had fallen back in her chair, her face white, her hands tightly clinched. She raised herself with an effort, and her voice had a strange tone as she said:

"Thank you, Mr. Flite. Let us say no more on this unpleasant subject. I am detaining you. Suppose we finish our financial business."

"Very well. I have here a statement of dividends and expenses."

He unfolded some papers, and began a detailed account of investments and interests, to which Clare seemed to be paying attention. Yet Osborn, whose eyes were fixed on her face, saw that her thoughts were far distant.

"That leaves two thousand, two hundred and fifty to your credit," he concluded.

"What are we to do with it? Do you wish to draw any part of it?"

"I don't know," she answered, in a helpless tone, her hands laid listlessly on her lap. "I will think about it. I am much obliged to you, Mr. Flite."

"Not at all," he briskly answered, rising and taking his hat. "Business is business. Good-day, Miss Amberly. Are you going now, Westly?"

"Not just yet," he replied. "I will follow you soon."

Mr. Flite bowed himself out in his stiff fashion, leaving his partner with Miss Amberly.

They sat for several minutes, without a word being said. Osborn played lightly with the fringe of the table-cover, but his eyes covertly sought Clare's face, which was slowly losing its rigid look, and regaining its color. But a line of pain lingered around the corners of the lips, which the utmost effort of her proud soul could not throw off.

"This is a highly unpleasant business, Clare," he said, in his softest tones. "I don't wonder that it has somewhat upset

you. It upset me as well. In fact you had half convinced me by your arguments that Hamilton might have been unjustly condemned. Circumstantial evidence is so uncertain. But he has settled the matter most decidedly this time. I do not like to be put down in Flite's hard way, but I am afraid he has the right of it."

"It looks so," she said, in a wavering voice. "Do not let us talk of it. I am, as you say, upset by this terrible affair. To think of it!" she broke out passionately. "And I had such sympathy for that man! I could— But no more! No more! I am not in the mood to even think of it with patience."

Dorsey fluently changed the subject. He was a ready talker, and introduced several themes of ordinary gossip, to which she made an effort, but not a very successful one, to respond.

Evidently she wished him gone. But he had not yet completed the full purpose of his visit. Playing with his hat, which lay on the table, he at length said, in a tone of the softest deference:

"I hope you have not lost sight of the question I asked you two nights ago. Just now may be no time to renew the subject; but if you knew how I long for a reply."

She cast a glance at him almost of affright, and drew back in her chair with a shrinking motion.

"Not now! Not now!" she cried, with deep earnestness. "In the future. Soon. But do not make me answer now."

"Pardon me. It is my eagerness that has run away with me. But I will not fairly live till I have had your answer. I love you so, Clare. But I may hope? Say I may hope. It will make me the happiest of men."

She made no answer. Her face was buried in her hands. For several minutes she sat thus. Osborn took up his hat, while an expression so bitter that it was almost malignant crossed his usually calm face.

He walked to the door without another word. She roused herself as he reached it.

"Don't go!" she called, excitedly. "Or, yes, go. I am not fit to talk on such subjects now. Come again, soon—to-morrow, Mr. Osborn. I hope I have not hurt you by my strange behavior. I hardly know what ails me to day. I am not well, I think."

"Thanks, dear Clare. You give me new life. To-morrow, then. And may it bring me a lifetime's happiness!"

He was gone.

She fell back in her chair, and closed her eyes. But her lips worked convulsively and her fingers thoughtlessly tore the handkerchief which they clasped.

"Oh, my God!" she groaned! "Can it be? Can it be? And I had suffered that long-stifled love to regain its place in my heart! Dorsey! Dorsey! If you knew how you were killing me!—But I will not condemn him unheard. I must hear the truth from his own lips! He may—he must be able to explain away this terrible evidence!"

She sprung up impulsively, and hastened from the room. For a half-hour it remained empty. Then she reappeared, but with a complete change of dress. Her silken robes had given place to a very plain walking-dress of some gray fabric. Every trace of ornament had left her person. Her whole attire was simple and unobtrusive. She might readily have passed for a member of the industrial class of society.

"It will not do to excite observation," she murmured. "But I must see Dorsey. I must hear his tale from his own lips. I owe it to my own soul, and my sense of right, not to condemn him unheard."

In less than an hour she was at the prison-gates. Entrance was not difficult to gain. In the county prison of Philadelphia visitors can have free access to the corridors, but not to the cells, except in the case of privileged parties. Ordinary visitors must talk through the narrow wicket in the cell-door.

It was a white and sad face that presented itself at the wicket of Dorsey Hamilton's cell, which had been readily opened by the obliging keeper.

A spasm of feeling passed through the young lady's heart as she saw him sitting supinely on the edge of his narrow prison-bed, his head disconsolately hung down.

He lifted his head as suddenly as if he had

received some magnetic impulse, and looked into the face before him.

A strange cry came from his lips. He shuddered, and drew back in the cell, his eyes fixed in a peculiar glare on those well-known features. Had some strange necromancy brought them before him?

"Dorsey," she said, in a low but strangely steady tone. "It is I. I could not rest until I had seen you. I must know from your own lips if you are guilty or innocent of this terrible accusation."

He placed his hands before his face as if he saw something accusing in those eyes, and wished to shut it out.

"Is it indeed you, or a specter come to mock me? Is it Clare Amberly?"

"Yes, yes, Answer me. Here is my hand, if you wish to be convinced that I am flesh and blood."

"No! I dare not touch that pure hand. The touch of a man like me, who is infamous in the sight of the world, would defile it."

"Infamous!" she repeated in a tone of terrible anguish. "Answer me. Are you guilty or innocent of this crime!"

Her voice was full of deep vibrations, and her face wore a look of bitter sternness as his words and manner had already given some answer to her demand.

"I hardly know," he said wearily. "The circumstances against me seem so terrible. I have not wittingly committed the crime. And yet how shall I ever explain away that horrible array of circumstances?"

His confinement seemed to have broken his nerve. He appeared to not know what he was saying.

"Then you do not deny?" Her voice grew intensely sorrowful. "You admit the crime? Oh, Dorsey Hamilton, you do not know what you have slain in me! All my trust in man is gone from this moment! I care no longer what becomes of me!"

She withdrew her face from the window. It was pallid as a death mask.

With a leap as of a wild animal he sprung forward.

"Clare! Clare!" he cried. "Do not go! You will kill me if you go! I was beside myself! I knew not what I said! Give me an opportunity to speak! I will explain all! I will convince you of my innocence!"

He saw in the corridor that white, stern, accusing face, turned toward him with an aspect that crushed all hope in his soul.

"You will lie to me," she said, with intense bitterness. "You have let me surprise the truth from you. Has it come to this at last, that I must despise you in my soul?"

"I cannot explain it to myself," he cried, bewildered by his rush of emotion. "I am the victim of a plot—a conspiracy! It is deeply laid, but I will unfold it. Give me time, Clare. Give me time!"

"I gave you five years in the other pretended conspiracy," she scornfully replied. "Instead of clearing your reputation as you promised, I find you charged with another unexplainable crime; and it is the same old story of a plot against you. You cannot—you dare not claim innocence of this crime. I have surprised the truth from your shrinking lips. Farewell, Dorsey Hamilton! It is the last time we shall ever see each other. Our lives henceforth flow apart."

He had withdrawn a step into his cell, as if he could not bear the deep accusation in her eyes. He rushed forward again at these last words. She had turned away, and was walking with a stately step down the corridor. He called to her in a tone of wild agony, but she did not turn or respond. She would not let him see the hopeless despair of her face. A moment, and she had vanished from sight.

With the countenance of a dead man, he flung himself on the bed and buried his face in despairing agony in the pillow.

CHAPTER XX.

COP MAKES A PRIVATE INVESTIGATION.

At an early hour of the next day, Cop Colt, in his foppish disguise as George Gordon, made his appearance at William Warren's establishment. He was, if anything, more stunning than before, and twirled his natty cane in a manner to fill with despair the souls of certain young gentlemen in the store.

"Can I see Mr. Warren?" he asked of one of the principal bookkeepers.

"He is out. Will not be back for an hour."

"Oh, well, I'll wait. The day is young, and I'm one of the sort that always have plenty of spare time on hand."

The clerk, who recognized him as the companion of the detective on the previous day, at once introduced him into Mr. Warren's private office.

"Much obliged. Have you the morning paper?"

"Here it is, sir."

Cop stretched himself out comfortably, gave his mustache an extra twist, and lifted the paper daintily to his eyes, but with an air as if it was rather a heavy weight for his weak nerves.

He believed in living up to his character.

The clerk laughed on returning to the outer office.

"That's a daisy of a detective," he remarked. "All he finds out about anything you can put in a nutshell and rattle it. Why, it is enough to give a man the spring fever just to look at him."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," remarked another. "The man has an eye like a gimlet. I caught it fixed on me, and I felt as if I had been bored through."

"Wouldn't take much to bore you through, Kent. You are not very solid timber."

While the clerks outside were laughing at this joke at the expense of one of their number, the detective had dropped his paper, and was engaged in a close survey of the office in which he sat.

Not that he expected to discover anything, but it was an instinct with him to let nothing escape his eyes. Sometimes proof lurked in the most unexpected corners.

After a few minutes he rose, stretched himself, and advanced to the desk.

"I think I will take another look at that book," he said, with a peculiar smile.

Several account-books occupied a rack at the back of the high desk. Some others were in a small, open safe at the side of the room. Cop examined all these, but the book he sought was not among them.

"Put away, is it?" he smiled. "Only a prudent precaution. I must ask my friend outside for the privilege of examining it."

He called the clerk, and made known to him his wish. The latter shook his head.

"Sorry, sir, but I am afraid you will have to wait for Mr. Warren. The book you want is locked up. It is too important to be left lying around. Something might happen, you know."

"Very true. That is quite a business-like precaution. What are all these books?"

"Mr. Warren's private ledgers and cash-books. Some of them run back for years."

"Did Hamilton keep only the one book?"

"There are entries in his hand in some of these books."

"Please show them to me. I would like to study his handwriting. It might be important if there should be any question about the cash-book entries."

"I see," answered the clerk. "You will find his work here. And here."

He opened two books and pointed to certain entries, calling Cop's attention to the fact that they were in a different handwriting from the remainder of the book.

"Here is where he stepped in. You can see that he wrote a very clear, plain hand."

"Much obliged. These are his entries, then? Thanks. Handwriting is one of my strong points, and I wish to get a good idea of his. It may be useful."

The clerk withdrew, leaving Cop to his investigation.

But he had evidently been playing a little on the credulity of the clerk, for the subject of handwriting did not seem to long trouble his mind.

Or if it did, it was his own handwriting.

He took a sheet of paper from the rack, dipped a pen in an open ink-bottle on the desk, and wrote a few words in a flourishing hand.

These he compared with the writing in the books, very closely observing them.

"It is not the same," he muttered.

He looked around him. A second inkstand sat on a small table near the window. This he tried, after cleaning the pen. He wrote another word on his sheet of paper, which he critically examined, with a doubtful shake of the head.

His next movement was to make a searching investigation of the room, as if he had grown suddenly insane on the subject of ink. But no other supply was to be found.

"So far good," he said. "It is very clear they are not the same. The difference in shade is very slight, but it is enough. Now to find out if it means anything."

Looking to the door to make sure that he was not observed, he took from his vest pocket a minute vial, which appeared to contain an amber-colored liquid. Uncorking this he very carefully let fall three small drops of the liquid, one on a portion of the older writing in the book, one on a figure in Dorsey's handwriting, and one on a letter of the words he had just written.

He then replaced the cork and returned the vial to his pocket. He keenly watched the transparent drops, which had spread and flattened on the paper.

Gradually a look of satisfaction came upon his face. In fact there was a considerable difference in the behavior of the three drops. That on the older writing appeared to produce no effect. The black lines showed clearly through it.

But the writing which he had just performed spread and grew cloudy. After a minute the blackness of the ink had changed to a dirty brown color.

The third drop, that which had fallen on Dorsey's writing, yielded a very different result. The ink rapidly faded beneath it, and after a minute or two completely vanished, leaving the paper white and unstained.

"By the Lord Harry, I fancy I've struck a nest egg this time!" exclaimed the detective. "I knew the ink wasn't the same, at sight. And it gives way to the acid in a most encouraging style."

Carefully wiping off the three drops, as a result there remained a slightly-faded ink mark in one case, a discolored spot in a second, and clean, white paper the third. It needed an eye like that of Cop Colt to discover the very faint shade of discoloration that remained.

"I'll give these fellows the credit of being sharp—yes, mighty sharp," he declared. "But they are not the only sharp people in the world. They should have remembered that. Yet it is no wonder that Dorsey Hamilton fell into the trap they had laid for him. So he was provided with a special brand of ink, eh? Very good. I'd give something, now, for a sample of that ink."

He stood and thought for a moment. Then, as an idea came to him, he opened the door to the outer office.

"Will you be kind enough to step here a minute?" he asked one of the young men at the books.

The person addressed stepped into the private office, and Cop closed the door behind him.

"I believe I saw you yesterday," he said. "You were the gentleman who occasionally worked in this office, in company with Mr. Hamilton?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your opinion of Hamilton? Do you think him guilty?"

The clerk looked surprised.

"I don't see that my opinion is of any importance," he said. "I liked him very much, and am loth to believe that he is such a man as circumstances seem to make him."

"Very good. Will you agree not to repeat in the office the questions I am about to ask you? They are in Mr. Hamilton's favor."

"Certainly," answered the clerk still more surprised. "I shall be glad to do anything to help him."

"Is this the ink that is used in the outer office?" and Cop pointed to the inkstand on the desk.

"Yes, sir. I filled that stand myself, from the bottle used outside."

The speaker looked as if he did not know what to make of this odd question.

"When?"

"Yesterday morning."

"Ah! Then you found it empty yesterday morning? But this is not the ink that Mr. Hamilton used?"

"How can you tell that?"

"It is very plain; See here. There is a slight difference of shade in the writing."

"I wouldn't have noticed it," acknowledged the clerk. "But you have guessed

right. The ink is different. About the time Mr. Hamilton came here Mr. Warren brought in a bottle of ink of a different make, which he said he wished me to try. That has just run out. It was used only in this office."

"What make was it?"

"Here is the bottle." He looked on a shelf. "No, it is gone. I presume Mr. Warren has thrown it away. I remember the name, though. It was Ray & Co.'s writing fluid."

"I am sorry it is all gone. I should have liked a sample of that ink."

"I guess I can give you that," said the surprised clerk. "I am writing with it now. I filled up my ink-stand from the bottle two or three days ago."

"Then please bring it in here. And try and get me a small, empty bottle."

A few minutes sufficed to do this. Cop tightly corked the sample of ink given him, and deposited it in his pocket.

"That will do. Now, will you be kind enough not to mention what we have been talking about? You can say I asked you some questions about handwriting, or anything you prefer. Understand that I am working in Dorsey Hamilton's interest. And be sure and impress on your mind what you have told me to-day. You may need to repeat it elsewhere."

"But what can the ink have to do with it?" asked the curious youth.

"You will know that very soon. Just now it is a secret. Can I depend upon your silence?"

"Yes, sir. I am willing to do anything I can to help Mr. Hamilton."

Dorsey closed the books he had been examining, placed in his pocket the sheet on which he had been writing and seated himself again to an apparent interest in the newspaper.

Five minutes afterward Mr. Warren entered. He looked with some surprise at the occupant of his office.

"Mr. Gordon?"

"At your service," said Cop, with a very polite bow. "I stepped around at Mr. Fay's request. If you have no objection, I should like another look at the doctored cash-book."

"I have looked it up, for fear of possible manipulation," answered Mr. Warren. "It is too important as evidence to be left open to every hand."

"A very judicious precaution. But Mr. Fay wishes me to make a memorandum of the false entries. He desires to compare them with the sums in the bank book."

"I see, I see," said Mr. Warren cheerfully. "Here is the book. I will show you the entries. It is a very good idea in Mr. Fay."

He unlocked a drawer in the safe and produced the desired book. Opening it, he eagerly pointed out the various questionable entries, showing their discrepancies with the entries in his diary.

"That is what I wish," said Colt, demurely, as he took a rapid memorandum of the amounts that disagreed in the two books. "It seems a clear case, Mr. Warren. The chap was not very cute."

"Oh! he intended to slide," answered Warren, with a laugh. "He was working his field hard, like a farmer who does not intend to rent for another year. Exhausting the soil as they say. I have a notion if I hadn't been wide-awake, and nipped the thing in the bud, that my man would have been off in a few weeks more, with a very well lined pocket."

"A lucky nip," rejoined Cop, who had finished his task. "But you have got the sharp fellow in a tight place now."

"I think I will pinch him a little before he gets out," laughed Warren.

In a few minutes afterward Cop was on the street, walking leisurely onward.

"If I don't mistake you are in a little of a tight place yourself, Mr. Warren," he said, "and may be pinched before you get out. Ray & Co.'s ink gives way to acid with suspicious ease. It is so strange that you happened to use that ink only during Dorsey Hamilton's period of employment."

CHAPTER XXI.

TRUMP CARDS IN THE GAME.

OUT at the Pennsylvania railroad depot, in West Philadelphia, a crowd of passengers

was collected. Every few minutes the gates were opened and a rush made to some of the numerous trains. But the void thus made was quickly filled again, and the active movement of human beings kept up.

Among these persons were several whom we have already met. One of these, a neatly-dressed personage, betrayed in his dissipated face the features of John Clark. He was sober enough now, and appeared nervous and uneasy, as he moved restlessly about the waiting-room, and gave occasional anxious glances at the clock.

Leaning against a corner of the news-stand were two others at whom we need no second glance to recognize Cop Colt and his young partisan, Bilkins. They seemed engaged in a desultory chat, yet there was not a movement of the restless traveler that escaped their eyes.

Still another person whom we have met stood beside the register. This was Westly Osborn. He was engaged in reading a paper, which he varied by an occasional glance at the clock, as if he was waiting for some coming or going train.

"Our friend Clark seems standing on pins," remarked Colt. "It is the natural anxiety of an escaping villain. You will see how quickly he throws it off when once on board and the train in motion."

"Won't it be a bit cruel to take him down suddenly, after letting him build up his hopes?" asked Bilkins, with a grin.

"A trifle, I grant. There are ups and downs in life, my boy, and every rogue has to take his share of them."

At this moment the station door opened, and a uniformed officer cried out:

"Through Pittsburg Express! Passengers for Pittsburg, Chicago, and the West."

There was a rush of the waiting passengers. Grasping a satchel, John Clark joined the rush for the train. Bilkins closely followed him. He was followed in his turn by a sharp-featured personage, to whom he had winked in passing.

Colt and Mr. Osborn had also made their way to the outer platform, but the latter stationed himself near the gate for incoming trains.

Several minutes passed. Then the Express began slowly to move. It was fairly off for Pittsburg and the West.

The detective walked over to Mr. Osborn, who stood leaning against one of the posts that supported the roof of the building.

"How do you do? Mr. Osborn, I believe?"

"Yes. But I cannot just place— Oh, yes! I remember. I met you at Belmont, in company with Judge Norwood."

"Exactly. I had been taking a spin behind the judge's brace of spankers. He set up his team suddenly, but there was no half-way business about it."

"The judge was always a lover of horses," answered Osborn calmly; "but he would sooner walk than drive a half-rate roadster. He has often told me that."

"Well, well, he didn't pick up that team for an old song," said Cop, with a shrug; "He must have had a sudden windfall."

"A bequest from an English uncle, who has lately died," answered Osborn quickly; "I fancy so, at least, for the judge is very close-mouthed about his private business.— Oh, there comes my train at last."

"Waiting for some one by the New York Express?" queried Colt. "We are in the same boat, then. I am looking for a delegate from the underworld of that city."

"And I for a representative of the upper world."

They were both disappointed. The tide of passengers from the train flowed past unchallenged. Osborn turned away.

"My man is not there at all events, though he telegraphed me to meet him."

"Nor mine," answered Cop, with a smile of peculiar meaning.

Meanwhile the Pittsburg train was rolling westward. Bilkins spoke a word or two to the conductor, who nodded significantly. Then the young man quietly seated himself beside Clark, who started violently on perceiving him.

"Glad to meet you," he mildly remarked. "How far West? I'm for Harrisburg."

"Chicago for me," answered Clark. "I have had enough of this straight-laced Quak-

er City. I want to get out where a man may breathe free."

"Then why not make for the plains?"

"Perhaps I will. I have no clear plans laid, except to get away into the free air. I will not soon trouble Philadelphia again."

"You had free whisky here. Isn't that as good as free air?" asked Bilkins, laughingly.

Clark looked at him sharply.

"Oh, the deuce take whisky! I'm done with it—sworn off. I am running away from the rascally drink that has made a brute of me."

"That's a very good idea," remarked Bilkins. "But you are not out of Philadelphia yet."

"Not, eh?"

"No. Here's the Hestonville station. And it looks as if the train was going to stop."

In fact, it was slowing up.

The conductor, who was standing near, signed to Bilkins. The latter, in his turn, signed to the sharp-faced man who stood close by in the aisle.

"Aren't you running away from something besides whisky?" asked Bilkins, demurely.

"What do you mean?" demanded Clark, with a nervous look.

"Only that here is a gentleman who looks as if he had some business with you."

The sharp-faced man bent over and laid his hand on Clark's shoulder.

"Sorry to disturb you," he said, "but you are wanted back there."

"What for?"

Clark trembled violently.

"Larceny. Here's my warrant." He held an official document before the pale face of the frightened man. "Diamond stealing. You will be wise to come quietly."

By this time everybody in the car was gazing curiously at the group.

"It is a lie!" roared Clark. "You have no authority to arrest me. I refuse to go with you."

The officer quietly opened his coat and revealed the badge of the police.

"Come!" he said, briefly.

The train had now stopped.

Clark looked up with a very pale face. His hand trembled violently as he grasped the seat. He looked into the stern face before him with a dubious glance. Then he reluctantly arose.

"I s'pose I'll have to go," he muttered, savagely. "But it is an outrage. I'm going to make somebody sweat for this."

"Quick!" cried the conductor; "I am losing time here."

The officer hurried his prisoner rapidly off the train. In an instant it was away again. Clark looked after it with a gaze of baffled anger. Now, for the first time, he perceived that Bilkins had also left the train. An idea of the truth seemed suddenly to flash across him.

Darting from the officer, he seized the smiling youth savagely by the shoulders, hissing out:

"This is your doing, you young hound! You have been smelling round me for a week, and this is what it was for! I'll salt you anyhow, blast your hide!"

He struck a fierce blow at the face before him, but it only met an upraised arm. At the same moment the young man seized his wrists with a strength he did not seem to possess.

"Try that on again, my man, and I'll lay you out," he said. "You are playing it on the wrong fellow this time. Here is your prisoner, sir."

"I will put the bracelets on him if there is any more of this," remarked the officer.

But that was the last outbreak of the captive. He seemed thoroughly disorganized by this arrest, at the very moment when he fancied himself safely off, with the proceeds of his crime in his pocket, to some safe harbor for rogues in the Far West.

In two hours afterward he was securely landed in the county prison, under the charge of the theft of a diamond ring from Alice Johnson, a crime committed five years before. It was the only charge on which Cop Colt was yet ready to obtain a warrant, to check the flight of a man whom he expected soon to have other use for.

The two men whom we left at the sta-

tion had meanwhile taken the Chestnut street cars, and were proceeding toward the center of the city together still conversing.

Osborn left the car at Sixth street. The detective continued in it until he reached Fourth street. There was a smile of strange meaning on his face as he gained the pavement.

"I've got one more card to play," he said. "If things work well, it ought to prove a trump. Let me see. Here is the place."

He entered a bank building with a massive and showy granite front.

Walking back into the banking room, he asked to be shown to the president's office. In a minute more he was introduced into a neatly-furnished and well-lighted apartment, occupied by a portly gentleman, who was engaged at an office-table strewn thickly with papers.

He looked up with a wrinkling of his eyebrows.

"Do you wish to see me, sir?"

"Yes," answered Cop quietly, seating himself, as he handed his card to the president.

The reading of this produced a sudden change in his expression.

"Excuse me," he said. "I am busy, but your errand must be important. I don't often have visits from gentlemen of your profession."

"I will not detain you long," answered Cop politely. "It is part of our trade to make a few words go a great way. Will you please inform me if this person banks with you?"

He wrote a name on a slip of paper, and handed it to the president, remarking:

"It is sometimes best not to mention names."

"Certainly," replied the president, with a look of surprise. "He is a heavy depositor."

"His late checks are yet in the bank?"

"I do not know when his book was last settled. I will inquire."

He left the office. In a minute or two he returned.

"It is six weeks since he settled. His book is here now, and the bookkeeper has just finished making it up."

"Then the checks are still here?"

"Yes."

"I am about to ask something now which may not be regular. But you know me, sir. It is in pursuance of an important legal investigation I am here. It is necessary that I should know if you have a check drawn by him to the order of Judge Norwood. Also its date and amount."

"I do not think I have the right to answer that," replied the president, shaking his head doubtfully.

"I have not come here without authority," rejoined Cop. "I have an order from Judge Allison, requesting you to give me the desired information. That will clear your skirts. And besides, this matter will not be made public. Only you and I will know it."

He handed the judge's order to the bank president. The latter read it carefully.

"That's Allison's signature, at any rate. I know it well," he remarked. "I would hardly do this under other circumstances."

He left the room again, returning quickly with a bank book containing a thick bundle of canceled checks.

"For what date shall I look?"

"Not after March 10th."

"Think it must be on the top of the bundle."

He ran the checks rapidly through his practiced fingers, while Cop looked on with a slightly anxious face. It was by no means sure that this experiment was going to prove successful.

"Ah!" cried the president, in a minute. "You are right. Here it is, under date March 6th. Drawn to order of J. C. Norwood."

"What amount?" asked Cop, with a look of deep satisfaction. His random arrow had hit the mark.

"Ten thousand. That's a pretty good pill. The judge must have been operating heavily on the street."

"Or on the bench perhaps," said Cop, with a smile. "It must be a useful service that is paid for at that rate. The judge could afford to set up his team."

As he spoke he rapidly copied the face of the check into his memorandum-book.

"I wish you would make note of that, sir. You may be questioned."

"There is nothing shady, I hope? There cannot be in the dealings of two men of their standing."

Cop's face wore a meaning look.

"Big ships sometimes sail in muddy waters," he remarked. "That is all I am at liberty to say just now. But you may be surprised before many days. It is very doubtful, however, if I shall make any public use of that check. I only wished to see it for my own private satisfaction. And now, sir, one more question, if you please. Can you tell me anything about the dealings of the firm of Benton & Co.?"

"I don't know much about them," answered the president.

"What I want to know is whether the proprietor of this bank account has much to do with them. If there is much interchange of cash you should know."

"That does not follow. We do not trouble ourselves about the drawers of checks that are deposited with us. I happen to know, however, that a good many large checks have been drawn by Benton & Co. to his order, for several years back."

"That will do. I am much obliged."

Cop rose, and bowed himself out of the office.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE KEY TO UNLOCK A DRUNKARD'S MOUTH.

WE must pass onward to a period several days later than that of the last chapter. During the interval several things of importance had happened. Dorsey Hamilton had been released on bail. This, refused by Judge Norwood, had been admitted by Judge Allison, under the influence of a private interview with the detective. The bail had been fixed at a reasonable figure, and Mr. Fleming, Dorsey's friend, taken as surety, in spite of a violent opposition by Mr. Warren.

A second event, of a less public character, had been an engagement of marriage between Clare Amberly and Westly Osborn. Fully convinced of the double crime of the man she loved, and in a state of desperation which her pride could hardly conceal, she had yielded to Osborn's suit. She respected, though she did not love him, and was in a mood in which she did not care what became of her.

"Whenever you please," she said, as he urged her to a hasty marriage. "I care nothing for display, and do not care how soon or how quiet it be. I am tired, Westly, deadly tired of this phase of life. I leave it all to you."

He smiled quietly to himself. Though he spoke not he well knew what was at the bottom of her listless resignation. But his tone was all softness and mildness, with none of the triumph that showed in his face.

"Thanks, dear Clare. A thousand thanks. I have your happiness in view as well as my own, and I so long to call you mine, that I cannot abide to wait long for that dear time."

One of our characters, however, remained an inmate of a prison cell. This was John Clark, whose project of flight had been so suddenly checked.

In fact, his hopes had been ruthlessly dispelled. He had dreamed of a royal fling in the unbounded West, and suddenly found himself cramped in the ten by six of a prison cell. His money, of which he had a plentiful provision—the price of crime and silence—was taken from him. But what most troubled him was the sudden cutting off of his supply of liquor, which had become the very elixir of life to him.

On the morning in question he was ranging about his cell like a wild beast in his cage, devoured by thirst, when the door was suddenly opened and a new inmate thrust into the cell.

"There, I guess you two can room together," declared the keeper. "We are a little too crowded with guests to give each of you gentlemen a separate hotel parlor."

Laughing at his heartless jest, he locked the cell-door and walked carelessly away.

The former tenant of the cell stopped in his wild promenade and cast a surly glance at his new companion.

A look of rage shot into his eyes. He had recognized his old associate—Jake Jumper, the tramp.

"Hello!" he cried, glaring at him with bloodshot eyes. "It's you, is it, you beat? You're just the coon I've been looking for, and by cock and pye I'll serve you out for a low-lived pick-thief!"

He advanced on Jake with enraged face and glaring eyes, but the old tramp did not seem a bit scared.

"Hold yer own, hoss!" he hoarsely growled. "Don't git on yer ear 'bout nothin'. Ye ain't forgittin' that we're old cronies."

"Cronies be diddled!" roared Clark, clutching him by the shoulders and shaking him violently. "Where is the ring you stole from me? Fork it over, or I'll tear you limb from limb!"

"Deuce take your ring! That's what got me here, too. I ain't got nary ring, but I've got what's about as good, I reckon."

He drew something from his pocket, and held it up to his comrade's gaze. It was a pint bottle of whisky.

The sight of this suddenly turned the current of the drunkard's thoughts. He released Jake, and made a frantic clutch at the bottle; but the old fellow was too quick for him.

"Give it to me!" he roared like a madman. "Give it to me, or I'll murder you!"

The sight of the liquor had roused in him all the insane thirst of the habitual drunkard.

"Hold yer level," answered Jake, coolly. "I ain't goin' to be a hog 'bout it, but I ain't goin' to let you be a beast. I'll give you a nip whenever I'm ready, but you've got to keep yer dirty fingers off my hide. D'y'e hear that?"

"Quick then. I won't touch you. Don't you see I'm wild for it? Crazy for it? I must have liquor or I'll go mad."

The old fellow, gripping his bottle firmly, poured out a gill of the strong contents into a cup which he found in the cell, and offered it to the inebriate, whose eyes glared on it like those of a thirsty tiger.

He seized it violently, and swallowed it at a draught.

"More! more!" he roared.

"Not a drop, you whisky swill-tub," rejoined Jake, contemptuously. "Gotta make this last. Don't ye feel better?"

"Yes, yes. You have saved my life. You have made a man of me." He seized Jake's hand in a maudlin manner. All his late rage had vanished.

"Now let's talk." Jake seated himself on the bed. "Long's they've put us together we mought as well have a sociable chat."

"Then hide that bottle. The sight of whisky sets me wild."

Jake did so. He had not touched the liquor himself.

"Want to know where you got that rascally diamond," he demanded. "It's got me inter nothin' but scrapes. And it's that brought me here."

"So it did me," declared Clark. "And it's all through you. Blast your picture, you got me drunk and stole it from me."

"Now shet yer pipes on that. I knowed ther'd be some o' that sort o' palaver. Got drunk and guy it to me, and then want ter say I stole it."

"I gave it to you?"

"You bet," answered Jake, unblushingly.

"You lie like a thief."

"Why, you whisky-still, you were so boozy you didn't know a hoss from a donkey. If you call me a liar ag'in I'll bu'st the bottle. Deuce take yer old ring, it's guy me nothin' but trouble. They swear you got it fu'st by stealin' it, and that's what brought me yere."

"What made you go flirting it around?" demanded Clark, subdued by Jake's threat. "I always kept it shady."

"Much you did. I s'pose you didn't flirt it in Joe Flite's face? That's what fotched all the diffikilty. He tracked it to me, and swore you stole it, five year ago, from a gal named Alice Johnson. How's that, crony? No use shenanigin 'bout it, though, fur they've had the gal up, and she swears ter the ring."

Clark had his face in his hands, in tipsy

regret. After his long abstinence the modicum of whisky had gone to his head.

"Why did I touch the fatal ring?" he groaned, repentantly. "Why did I not fling the infernal thing into the river? It is that made me what I am. It made me a drunkard. It made me a thief. It made me a traitor to my best friend. It has ruined my whole life, and now it has brought me at last to a prison cell. I have sold my soul to a fiend, through that fatal ring. And now it has brought me to ruin and disgrace."

The poor inebriate seemed in the lowest depths of remorse and despair.

"It brung me here, too," rejoined Jake, with a show of sympathy. "Joe Flite swore I stole it from you, and he had me snatched lively now, you bet."

"It is fatal to all who touch it," declared Clark, morosely. "I hope to Heaven it may land *him* in prison, too. Then I would have some revenge for all I owe him."

"Who?" asked Jake. "Joe Flite?"

"No. Who said anything about Joe Flite? The man I mean—But you're pumping me! You're a spy they've set on me to hang me!"

He rose in sudden anger and advanced furiously on Jake.

"Hold yer hosses, shipmate," said the latter, coolly. "What the blazes d'ye think I want to spy on ye for? They've got you in a hole now, Jack Clark. Blast yer eyes fur a fool, you don't know what's come out since you've been in quod. Who was it put money in bank in Dorsey Hamilton's name? Who hid the bank book in his desk? Ha! I s'pose you don't know that?"

Clark retreated with eyes distended with fright.

"It is a lie!" he growled, hoarsely; "I never did it! Who says I did it?"

"Some o' these law hounds. They've been trackin' yer steps," answered Jake, indifferently. "Come, you look flustered. Guess another nip won't do no hurt."

"Yes! Whisky! whisky! Give me whisky!"

Jake quietly poured him out a small quantity more. The thirsty drunkard watched his movements as a wild-cat watches the meat that is being doled out to him. His mad thirst had not yet been half allayed.

Jake handed him the cup, and coolly returned the bottle to his pocket. Clark swallowed the strong drink as if it had been a draught of cold water.

"So there's some chap that's been eggin' you on to all this devility," resumed Jake, carelessly. "That's lucky fur you. It mought save ye from the Hill if you blow on the coon. But how come he to git a sharp feller like Jack Clark under his thumb? Wouldn't never ha' thought it o' you."

Clark crouched on his chair and rested his face on his hands with a despairing gesture.

"It was that fatal ring!" he muttered. "He accused me of stealing it, and made me acknowledge. Ah! fool that I was. Ever since that moment I have been his slave. He supplied me with money. He encouraged me to the course of drunkenness, into which remorse had plunged me; he made me a sot

I have tried more than once to break from him, and acknowledge the truth. But I was too weak, and too much in dread of him. It was he who drove me into new crime. That bank book was all his work. I was never free from his deadly eye. And now, when at last he set me free, and supplied me with money to go West and live an honest life, the theft of the ring comes on me at last. All that I have done to hide it has been useless.

After all these years of misery and crime, the consequences of my first wrong act come back on me—come back on me, and drive me to despair!"

He crouched to the floor, and curled himself up into a heap, in which his anguished convulsed face was hidden.

Jake crouched down beside him, his wrinkled face terrible in the intensity of its eagerness.

"His name?" he whispered, in the ear of the remorse-stricken man—"his name? Who was the villain that drove you to this ruinous fate?" At that moment the seeming tramp forgot his idiomatic speech.

"His name? I dare not mention his name! He would kill me if I betrayed him!"

"Why, you blind fool, don't you see that

he has betrayed you? How did I learn all I have told you? How come you to be arrested in the cars that were carrying you away? How is it that he has not been here to take you from jail? He has betrayed and deserted you, confident that, say what you please in these prison walls, no one will believe you. Before you get out of here he will be far away with the gains of his crimes. He has made you his blind tool. Tell me his name! He shall not escape then. I have the means to reach him. I will see that you are avenged."

The despairing man looked up with new hope. Yet the shadow of fear rested in his eyes.

"What can you do? An old tramp like you! You do not know this man!"

"I do not fear him."

"I do. I dread him like death! And he will save me yet. He dare not leave me here. I will not lose my chances by telling his name."

"Laws, old crony, what differ does it make to me?" demanded Jake, dropping again into his vernacular. "You've made me kinder cur'us, that's all. Come, pile it out ter the old chap, and I'll get ye another nin."

"I daren't speak it!"

"Whisper it, then."

Jake inclined his head.

"Will you give me the bottle?" asked Clark, with avaricious eyes.

"Sartain. Here's the swill."

He held the bottle within Clark's reach, but gripped it tightly. He was not green enough to yield it till he had the word.

Clark looked at it with wavering eyes. But the thirst for drink was growing again in his nerves. He gazed at it with ever growing desire. His fingers nervously clutched its neck. It was too much. He would have sold his soul just then for that coveted prize.

He bent his head, and whispered in Jake's ear the long-concealed name.

At the same instant there came the sound of the keeper's key at the cell door.

"Hide it! Hide it!" cried Jake, yielding the bottle.

The inebriate quickly concealed it under the bed, and flung himself desperately above it.

"Jake Jumper," said the keeper. "Come out here. You are sent for."

Jake stepped with a triumphant face through the open door. It was quickly shut and locked behind him. But little cared the drunkard convict for that. He had sold his associate in crime for the coveted bottle.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PLAY OF THE GAME.

"GLAD to see you, old boy. You have had a hard pull through since we had our last chat, but you don't look much the worse for wear."

The speaker was Mr. Fleming, the gentleman who had gone bail for Dorsey Hamilton. They had met in Cop Colt's office.

"Can I ever repay what I owe you?" cried Dorsey, grasping his extended hand. "I owe you a deep debt of gratitude, which I will not soon forget."

"Oh, faith, you would have done as much for me in the same case. I did not risk anything. I knew you were an innocent man."

"How could you know that? I have not felt quite sure of it myself, with the terrible array of circumstances around me."

"This gentleman satisfied me," rejoined Fleming, nodding toward Cop, who sat back quietly enjoying his meerschaum, and listening to their conversation.

"I wish he could satisfy me," said Dorsey doubtfully. "Or show me how to satisfy the lawyers and judges. I fear there is no hope for me. They have woven their net too tightly."

"Don't you believe the half of that," answered Cop. "Just keep quiet and I will tell you a thing or two. I don't mind Mr. Fleming hearing. He is on our side now."

He proceeded to quietly relate the result of his late investigations. The two auditors listened with spell-bound attention, and a growing feeling of indignation.

"Do you see the play of the game now?" asked Cop, as he proceeded with his story.

"We can plainly see the puppets moving."

under some hidden hand. In the first place Alice Johnson listened at your door when Mr. Markham gave you the key and the word. She stole the key and gave it, with the word, to her secret lover, William Warren. Was he the thief? I think not. I think I can see traces of another behind him, who had him in his power, and forced him to this act. The key, and some of the stolen material, was returned to your room through the same hands. Nothing of this came out on the trial. The evidence was all against you, and you went to prison."

"But do you know the main villain?" asked Dorsey in hoarse tones.

"Wait. There came a second move in the game which was not prepared for, and which has led to the discovery of the whole plot. Alice Johnson's love of finery induced her to keep a diamond ring, that was part of the jewels intended for your desk, and as evidence against you. This ring was seen by John Clark. He yielded to a sudden temptation and stole it. It has proved his bane. Warren missed the jewel and accused Alice of retaining it. She confessed, and told the story of its loss. The villains suspected Clark of the theft, charged him with it, and made him confess."

"How do you know this?" demanded Dorsey.

"All through Jake Jumper. You know old Jake Jumper?" Cop smiled knowingly. "What followed? Clark might have retrieved his crime by returning the ring, but it was now too late. He was in the power of a ruthless villain. In remorse and desperation he took to drink. Supplied with money by his tempter he sunk lower and lower, until he became a mere sot. Meanwhile Alice Johnson had been sent from the city, and you to prison as a convicted felon. All seemed fair weather to the mover of the puppets."

"The soulless fiend!" hissed Dorsey, in fierce indignation.

"But there came a turn in the tide. You were released from prison. You showed signs of making an effort to unravel the old plot. Your foes grew alarmed. It might be necessary to put you out of the way again. They laid a shrewd plan to dispose of you if you should become dangerous. You will remember what I told you when you accepted that situation from Warren?"

"I see now what a blind fool I was."

"You were in dangerous hands, young man. Luckily I have discovered their plan of action, skillfully as it was played. When you entered Warren's office it was supplied with a new brand of ink. When you left the office this ink was removed. By good fortune, however, I have obtained a sample of it. It is an ink that is made for the express use of a certain grade of rogues. There is an acid which transforms it into a transparent fluid, and leaves no trace of its use. Do you see now? When it was decided to spring the plot on you it was very easy to remove certain figures from your books, and replace them by other figures. This operation was performed by your villainous employer, the night before your arrest."

"Can this be true?" demanded Dorsey, incredulously. "Was it thus that the defalcation was made to appear? Good Heavens, what a crater I have been standing over!"

"There is no doubt of it," answered Cop, confidently. "I am as sure of it as if I had been present. But to show a defalcation on the books was not enough. The proceeds must be found. This was also provided for. An account was opened with Benton & Co. in your name. John Clark, under orders from his master, made the deposits."

"But why with Benton & Co.?"

"For certain reasons yet to be discovered. No ordinary bank would have accepted a deposit without seeing the depositor. It was necessary to choose one in which your hidden foe had a secret influence."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Mr. Fleming, for the first time speaking.

"What is wrong?"

"Nothing. But I may have something to say when you are through."

"A few words more will finish my recital," continued Cop. "To complete the plot it was necessary that the bank book should be in your possession, but concealed, as if you had carefully hidden it. This, too,

was done by John Clark, who knew of the secret drawer in your desk."

"That is so," exclaimed Dorsey. "I taught him the trick of it myself."

"You see that the plot was very shrewdly laid. They were now done with Clark. He was shipped West by his employer, with a pocket full of cash, as Alice Johnson had previously been shipped East. It was neatly played, but it has not worked. Clark did not go West, but South. He now occupies a cell in Moyamensing prison. And to complete all he has confessed the name of his tempter and employer."

"To whom?" demanded Dorsey, quickly.

"To old Jake Jumper."

"And what was that name?"

"Jake Jumper has not yet revealed it. We must let the old fellow speak for himself. But first I have another matter of some importance to relate. As I have said the first plot had its weak plank in the theft of the diamond ring. The second plot has its weak plank also."

"That discovery about the ink?" asked Fleming.

"No. That was only suspicious. This is sure."

"What is it?" demanded Dorsey, in high excitement.

"I have said that the bank book was found in your desk. But inside the book lay a slender slip of paper, which had worked its way in there by an odd chance. And this stray fragment, no larger than my little finger, is the best bit of evidence in our whole investigation. For it is the written order from the chief villain to his subordinate to consign their victim again to a prison cell."

"Ah!" exclaimed Dorsey. "Then you have won the game? My innocence will be established? My enemies will be punished?"

He sprung to his feet wild with hope and excitement, his eyes gleaming with the fire of expectation.

"I hope so, at any rate. Here is the slip."

He handed it to Dorsey, whose eyes greedily devoured its contents.

"Spring the trap. O."

"What can that mean?" he ejaculated. "Can there be anything in that? But stay—that writing—I should know that hand!"

"I know it," said Cop, coolly.

Fleming leaned over Dorsey's shoulder with equal interest. The affair was growing intensely exciting to the two auditors of the detective's story.

"This was sent to Warren by the main villain! It slipped by accident into the book which must have been in Warren's hand at the time? It is the order for the crime?" he asked, eagerly.

"That is my theory," answered Cop, quietly. "I have let you into this affair, Mr. Fleming, secret as it is necessary to keep it, for certain reasons. First, I promised to justify you in going Mr. Hamilton's bail. Next, you have something to say in the matter."

"That's true," rejoined Fleming. "I know a thing or two about it, that's a fact. That is, if your suspicions point to a member of the firm of Markham & Co., as I believe you told me."

"Just so."

"I happen to belong to the Oriental Club, of which Mr. Flite and Mr. Osborn are members," he continued. "I have asked some private questions there, at your suggestion, and have picked up a point or two, which may be of use. I know some old intimates of these gentlemen at the club, who were quite willing to talk."

"That is the idea. And I hope you will be ready to repeat their talk, in the interests of justice."

"It was not given in confidence," rejoined Fleming. "And even if it was I should be tempted to reveal it, in Mr. Hamilton's service."

Dorsey silently pressed his friend's hand. His feelings were too deep for speech.

"I have learned, among other things, that Messrs. Flite and Osborn entered, five or six years ago, into certain private speculations. These, however, they wished to keep from the knowledge of their principal partner, and therefore operated through two agents. At that time Mr. Benton, of Markham & Co., and Mr. Merry, of Drexel & Co., set up a brokerage business under the firm name of

Benton & Co. There was some surprise on the street at the time. They were neither of them moneyed men, and there was question where they got the funds for their bold operations. I have reason to know that these funds were privately supplied by Flite and Osborn. Yet these two gentlemen kept their operations secret. Their dealings with Benton & Co. were mainly performed through a third party, one William Warren."

Dorsey looked up with surprise and interest at these words. He was beginning to see through things.

"That is nearly all I have learned about the matter," continued Fleming. "But it is not quite all. Though Flite and Osborn employed the same agents, they did not operate in common. The result was that Flite lost money while Osborn was very successful, and grew rich. Flite, indeed, soon got a dose of speculation, though he still dabbles in a small way. But Osborn has kept it up until to-day. He still deals through Benton & Co."

"Anything more, Mr. Fleming? Do you know anything about the personal relations between these parties?"

"Why, it is said that Flite hates Warren like poison. All through our unlucky deal, I am told. He is a vinegary fellow, you know, and don't easily forgive. They say that Warren lost fifty thousand for him at one send, and that through pure carelessness. That ended their connection."

"Fifty thousand!" exclaimed Dorsey. "That was the amount stolen from the safe! When was this?" he excitedly demanded.

"I don't know exactly. Somewhere about that time."

"What do you think of that?" Dorsey turned to Cop.

The latter answered by a meaning smile.

"How about Osborn and Warren?" he asked.

"I don't profess to know." Fleming shrugged his shoulders. "There is some whisper that Warren tried to play a sharp game on his patron, and got caught in his trick. However that was he soon after started the grocery business. It is quite likely that there are some secrets between these two men, but I don't pretend to know what they are."

Cop picked up his pipe again, and leaned back comfortably in his chair.

"It is a terribly complicated business," he remarked. "I fancy that I have got the right threads, but I do not care to pull until I am sure. It is never wise to make a move until you are certain of your road. The crime is clear enough. But the motive! I want the motive."

Dorsey handed him back the slip of paper.

"That is Westly Osborn's writing," he remarked. "And it is signed with his initial."

"Yes. And yet it is possible it may be a forgery. It may have been placed in the book purposely, to divert suspicion in the wrong direction. What was the motive to this crime? Tell me that. It could not have been money. Neither of these men were in desperate straits for cash; or, at least, I do not think so. Yet speculators are often on the brink of ruin," he thoughtfully concluded.

"Was it not jealousy? That was your original idea."

"That did not hold water. Flite's behavior does not look as if he was capable of such a feeling. As for Osborn—"

"Now you speak of it," said Fleming suddenly, "that reminds me of a rumor I heard last night. It is said that Osborn, who has long kept clear from matrimonial schemes, has at last been caught by a pair of black eyes. They say that he is engaged to a young lady in Walnut street—a Miss Clare Ambler."

"The deuce!"

Cop whistled shrilly.

"Great God, it cannot be!" exclaimed Dorsey, in a tone of despair. "And after—" He staggered back, and rested his hands for support on the table. "But she despised and scorned me; she told me so! Ah! have I become freed from prison only for this?"

He fell listlessly into the chair beside him and buried his face in his hands, utterly unnerved by this sudden blow.

Fleming looked from one to the other in deep surprise.

"Have I stirred up a hornet's nest?" he asked.

"You may have hit on that mysterious motive," Cop answered. "Come, Dorsey, man, don't give up the ship! There's hope in the world yet. Let us talk this thing over a little further."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FIRST DAY OF THE TRIAL.

A MONTH and more has passed since the date of our last chapter, yet nothing of special interest to us has occurred in that interval. Many quiet moves have been made. Cop Colt's line of discovery has steadily strengthened. But all is yet as still and hidden as the action of the mole who quietly mines his way underground.

As for Dorsey Hamilton, he has been in a reckless and despairing state. In dread of losing the woman he worships, yet not at liberty to tell her of all he has learned, he remains anxious and irresolute, the prey of a thousand conflicting emotions.

It was late in the May term of the Court of Quarter Sessions that the case of William Warren *versus* Dorsey Hamilton was called, and the latter put on his trial for breach of trust and defalcation.

Judge Norwood was on the bench. By a strange chance, the second trial of the accused was called before the same judge who had formerly sentenced him on a similar charge. It was an unlucky accident. The aspect of the judge seemed to show that he would have little mercy on the prisoner, and that he believed him guilty in advance.

The court-room was well thronged on the trial. The affair had excited a great deal of public interest, and many business men were anxious to see its outcome. Among these were two members of the firm of Markham & Co., Mr. Osborn and Mr. Flite, the former with a look of compassion for the prisoner, the latter, cold, hard and inflexible of face.

Among the lady witnesses of the trial was one dressed in plain and severe black, who kept her face closely veiled during the whole proceedings. Yet there was something in her graceful form that seemed to recall Clare Amberly, which was also indicated by the fact that Mr. Osborn paid much attention to her during the day.

The trial opened with the evidence for the prosecution. This bore very hard on the accused. His former record, and his conviction for a crime of the same character, were brought strongly to the attention of the jury. Then William Warren was called to show that, out of pure compassion, he had given the discharged convict a position in a situation of trust. He had done so with the idea that he could safely trust a man who had a new reputation to make.

He went on to detail how he, moved by ordinary prudence, had kept a private record of the main financial operations trusted to his new clerk, and how, on comparing this with his cash-book after a month, he had discovered great and alarming discrepancies. The two books were offered in evidence.

The next point settled was the search of Hamilton's room, and the discovery of the bank book in his desk. Harry Fay was placed on the stand to corroborate this evidence. Finally the receiving teller of Benton & Co. was called to show that he had made the entries in the bank book, and that the sums had been deposited in Mr. Hamilton's name.

There was here one slight flaw in the evidence. Mr. Benton was examined, but professed to know nothing about the affair. The deposit must have been arranged with his partner, Mr. Merry, who was now absent in San Francisco. But the signature book of the firm was produced, and was found to contain the name of Dorsey Hamilton, in a hand that exactly agreed with other specimens of his handwriting.

Only one thing was needed to make the chain of evidence complete. The party who had made the deposits was not produced as a witness. Every effort had been made to find him, the prosecuting attorney said, but he could not be discovered. They had some reason to believe that he had been shipped from the city.

These were the main points of the evidence offered for the prosecution. There was scarcely any cross-examination, and that of a trifling character. To all appearance the

defense had given up the contest. Most of the persons present were satisfied that the defalcation had been fully established, and that the jury could entertain no question of the guilt of the accused.

This feeling was added to by his own deportment. At first he had remained quiet and confident. But as the day went on he became nervous and uneasy, his face flushing and paling, as telling points of testimony were made against him. It was not perceived that his eyes were frequently fixed in one direction, that of the veiled woman, and that he but reflected certain emotions which she exhibited.

The fact was that Dorsey had become aware of the presence of her he loved at his trial, and that his nervous agitation arose from his dread of how this telling testimony would affect her mind. He could not regain his composure through remembrance of the surprise which he had in store for his persecutors, when his own witnesses should be put on the stand.

The evidence for the prosecution occupied the whole of the first day of the trial. The defense was directed to call its witnesses for the next morning, and the court adjourned.

Just at this time a young man, who had recently entered the room, made his way to the side of Mr. Osborn, with whom he conversed earnestly for several minutes. The communication received, whatever it was, seemed to disturb the banker, and overthrow his complacent demeanor.

He spoke a few words to the veiled woman, and then made his way to the bench, where he entered into an earnest talk with the judge. The latter listened with seeming interest, nodded his head in assent, and drew a blank form toward him, on which he wrote rapidly.

This he handed to an officer of the court, with a few words of explanation. He again turned to Mr. Osborn, and some more words passed, after which the latter left the room, in company with the veiled woman, who had waited for him.

The court room was now nearly empty. Among those who yet lingered, however, was the detective, Cop Colt. The judge was on the point of retiring when this person came forward and addressed him:

"I do not wish to detain you, judge," he said, "yet I would like a few words with you in relation to this case."

"Certainly, Mr. Colt. If you can throw any light on it so much the better. Have you been engaged in the case?"

"I have, and have found out a few things which may prove of interest."

"Ah!" cried the judge, with animation. "So the quietness of the defense to day is not through defeat."

"Hardly. We intend to surprise you a little to-morrow. I calculate, before this trial is over to remove Mr. Hamilton from the prisoner's box, and put some other persons in his place."

The judge smiled incredulously.

"It looks black against him, Mr. Colt."

"He is the victim of a deep-laid plot, judge. Just what this plot is I am not at liberty to reveal, till it comes out on the trial. But this I will say, as I know it will go no further, that his former trial and conviction were part of the same plot, and that I intend to open up that old affair."

"This is nonsense, sir," declared the judge angrily. "I am surprised to hear such an assertion from you. Why, the evidence against him was overwhelming."

"So was the plot," smiled Cop. "But it is not that I wish to talk of now. There is certain evidence in our hands which we do not intend to bring forward unless it becomes absolutely necessary, yet which it is desirable for you to hear. It may change your view of the case."

"My view of the case must depend on the evidence offered on the stand," said the judge sternly. "I am surprised at you, Mr. Colt, for trying to influence me by outside considerations."

"There are things which it is not safe to tell," answered Cop quietly.

"Everything that is safe to listen to is safe to tell," rejoined the judge, with a frowning brow. "Please reserve your evidence for the witness stand, sir. And pray excuse me, my time is limited."

"I hope I have not annoyed you. I saw

your team waiting outside, and suppose you are off for a turn in the Park. By the way, judge, where did you suddenly get the windfall that enabled you to set up that stylish turnout?"

"What is that your affair?" demanded the judge, with an angry but startled air.

"This much," answered Cop quietly, "that is part of the matter of which I have just spoken. I happen to know where the money came from that bought that team, Judge Norwood. Do you think that matter is safe to tell?"

The judge turned pale, and nervously clutched his chair. He seemed to have received a severe blow.

"Sir!" he faltered. "I do not understand—"

"As I have said, I do not intend to speak of it," answered the detective. "But a few words written may not be amiss. Here are the names of a certain bank, a certain person, and the amount of a certain check drawn to the order of a certain judge."

He handed a written slip to the judge. The latter turned still paler on reading it, and tore it nervously into a hundred fragments.

"You are taking a wrong impression," he declared hastily. "There was nothing wrong about that check. I can prove that it was a correct transaction."

"I will tell you what it was, sir. The person I have named learned that a certain prisoner was about to be released for good conduct a year before the expiration of his term of sentence. This person had private reasons of his own why that prisoner should not be discharged. He induced Judge Norwood to rescind the order of discharge, but did not tell him his private reasons."

"He claimed that the man had uttered threats of revenge," exclaimed the judge, "and that it was not safe to set him at liberty."

"I am aware of that. And if he chose to give Judge Norwood a little present in return for this service, of course that was a mere business transaction. It was nobody else's affair."

The judge writhed under the cool and steady voice of the detective. He felt that he was in a tight box, whose sides might at any minute crush in on him. His one fault in office was coming back to ruin him.

"I hope you will not be discomposed, sir," continued Cop. "This matter is between ourselves. I am not the man to tell all I know. But this whole affair must come out. All but the check. I simply wish to show that fear of revenge was not the gentleman's reason. Something of more importance lay back of that."

"I heard of nothing else. I deemed that was sufficient warrant to detain the prisoner," declared the judge, in a highly disturbed voice. "The check, I tell you, was given for a different matter altogether."

Cop smiled incredulously.

"Well, let that rest. I just wish to let you see that there are two sides to this case. I fear you have been prejudiced against Mr. Hamilton. You will be apt to be slightly surprised when the defense gets fairly to work. But just now I wish to speak of another matter. I observed Mr. Osborn earnestly conversing with you."

"Yes," answered the judge; "perhaps you may know something about that affair. It seems that there is a person of his acquaintance illegally detained in the county prison. He has been arrested, but no charge preferred against him. Mr. Osborn applies for a writ of discharge."

"Which you have granted?"

"I have directed Mr. Thomas to see the magistrate who issued the warrant. If the prisoner has had no hearing, and nobody pressed the charge against him, it is illegal to detain him; he must be discharged."

"What is his name?" asked Cop. The judge looked at his papers.

"John Clark."

"I feared so. Your order of discharge must be withdrawn, judge."

"Why so?"

"Because it was I that procured the warrant against John Clark, and on very safe grounds. I can prove that he stole a diamond ring. Secondly, he is one of the main witnesses in the present trial, and if discharged now he very likely would be spir-

ited away, and we left in the lurch. He must stay where he is until to-morrow; after we have received his evidence, it will be time enough to set him free or press the charge against him."

"That puts a different face on the matter. But why did you not have him brought up for a hearing, and formally committed? I cannot refuse him a writ of *habeas corpus*, if applied for."

"Because I do not want to bring up a convicted felon as a witness. As for a writ of jail delivery, he has not asked for one."

"That is true. I will send an order rescinding my former one."

He wrote rapidly.

"Let me have it," asked Cop. "This is too important to trust to the chance hands of an uninterested agent."

Cop received the order, and quickly left the now emptied court-room. The judge disappeared in the opposite direction, with a slow step, and a much-disturbed face. He had decidedly been given some matter for unpleasant dreams.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SECOND DAY OF THE TRIAL.

In the handsome residence out Walnut street, the home of Clare Amberly, busy preparations were going on. The rumor of which Mr. Fleming had spoken was based on fact. She had yielded to the suit of Westly Osborn, and the day fixed for the wedding had now arrived.

The affair had not yet been formally made public. Both parties preferred privacy, and though considerable preliminaries were necessary, they had been conducted very quietly.

Throughout it all, indeed, Clare Amberly had not acted in the manner usual to young ladies on the eve of marriage. She had seemed disturbed, discomposed, the prey of a secret regret or secret trouble.

That this was the result of her feeling toward her former lover we have every reason to know. But she avoided any reference to Dorsey Hamilton, and seemed striving to overcome the deep emotion which wrought so sadly within her soul.

Whether Westly Osborn understood this or not, he said nothing on the subject, and appeared to quietly ignore the very evident preoccupation of his promised bride.

On the day of the trial he had not objected to her desire to be present, and had attended her home after the dismissal of the court, without a word passing between them on the subject.

It was not until the next morning that she spoke in reference to the matter. They were to be married at five o'clock that afternoon. Yet she could not consent to be wedded until she had relieved her conscience of its burden.

"I have not concealed from you, Westly," she said, playing nervously with the lace about her neck, "that I do not bear to you the feeling of love. I have a respect that may grow to love. You have pressed for my consent, and have accepted it under these conditions."

"I am satisfied that you do not know your heart, Clare," he answered, in his smooth voice. "At any rate I trust to make you love me, by loving you with all the force of my soul."

"But that is not all," she continued, in low tones. "I have a confession to make which I cannot avoid. I have loved another. It is for that reason my heart has been impervious to your devoted suit. I confess this now, ere it is too late. If it is a bar to our marriage, you are at liberty yet to break the engagement. I cannot wed you with a lie upon my lips."

"I have long feared what you now so nobly reveal," he quietly replied. "I esteem you all the more for speaking as you have done. I want you, Clare. I have wanted you for years. I am glad to take you with the shadow of this old love hanging over us. I do not fear it will mar our happiness." He took her hand and looked tenderly into her eyes.

"Have you a suspicion to whom I refer?"

"I have. I saw it years ago, with the jealous eyes of love. Yet it is a person who has long since forfeited all claim to the love of a woman as pure and noble as you."

"I could not believe in his guilt," she sad-

ly said. "I hoped and waited, fearing to do him an injustice in my soul. After his release I became satisfied of his innocence, and was supremely glad that I had waited. But now—"

"This new crime—this trial—have convinced you of his guilt?"

"I was convinced before that, or I would not have accepted your suit. I visited him in prison, Westly. I must tell you all now. I demanded from him a plain declaration of his guilt or innocence. What answer did I get? He prevaricated and offered some lame efforts at explanation and appeals to my feelings. What could I think? His crime was evident. I could no longer refuse the proffer of your love. Dorsey Hamilton was henceforth dead to me!"

She pressed the hand that still held hers in a warm clasp.

"Yet you waited? You wished to learn the result of this trial?"

"Not with hope," she replied. "I was satisfied. Yet I felt that so much was due to him. I spent yesterday in the court. It was a sad and weary day for me. Not a possible doubt of his crime can remain. The strength of the evidence was redoubled by his own guilty deportment, I wish to see no more of it, Westly, or to think of him no more. I would be ashamed to confess that a shadow of affection for this disgraced felon remains. I have only you now, and I hope to love you as I have loved him. You have waited with long and unyielding affection on my vacillating humor. I hope you forgive me, Westly."

He replied by an ardent embrace, to which she yielded with more pleasure than she had yet shown in his demonstrations. She seemed to feel that she had but him to lean on now.

While this conversation was going on the court had assembled, the jury been ushered into their seats, and all preparations for the continuance of the trial made.

It is not necessary to give a detailed description of this trial. The reader already knows the character of the evidence which Cop Colt had collected. He had promised to astonish the judge and the court, and he certainly succeeded in doing so.

The cash-book which had been put in evidence the day before was now placed in the hands of experts, and it was proved that all Dorsey's entries had been made in a peculiar ink, which could easily be removed by the use of acids. It was also shown that there were signs of the entries having been tampered with.

The clerk whom Cop had questioned about the ink was next put on the stand, and testified that it had never been used in the office except by the prisoner. It seemed to have been provided expressly for his use, and removed on his arrest. At the conclusion of this evidence the small sample of the ink which Cop had procured was opened in evidence. It, with the acid which removed it, was put into the hands of the jury.

The next evidence related to the bank book. The receiving teller of Benton & Co. was put on the stand, and testified that Mr. Hamilton, though often in the bank, had never made a deposit for himself. They had all been made by a dissolute looking stranger.

Mrs. Hamilton was the next witness. She testified to the visit from John Clark on the second day before the arrest, and his peculiar delay in leaving the house.

By this time, as may be imagined, the attention of the court was intensely excited. Strong indications of a conspiracy against the prisoner were evident, which were not decreased by the striking uneasiness of William Warren, who had diligently attended the trial.

But greater sensations were in store. The prosecutor now announced to the court that he would call John Clark, the person just named. An effort had been made the evening before, he said, to get rid of this important witness, but it had failed, through the diligence of a shrewd detective. John Clark would now be called to the stand.

This announcement directed the attention of the court closely to the somewhat bloated, nervous, and excited individual who now came forward, under the charge of an officer of the court.

Before he was put on the stand Benton & Co.'s receiving teller was recalled, and testified that he was the man who had made the deposits in Dorsey Hamilton's name.

Clark now took his place. He seemed seriously disturbed, and very unwilling to respond to the searching questions of the attorney, but finally was obliged to admit that he had made the deposits, and that he had not done so as an agent for Dorsey Hamilton.

"From whom then did you receive the bank book and the money deposited?" asked the lawyer.

The witness hesitated, and cast his eyes irresolutely around the court.

"Come, sir; will you please answer my question? Who engaged you to do this and provided you with money?"

The witness slowly lifted his finger and pointed across the court-room.

"The person whom I see sitting there," he answered; "William Warren."

All eyes were turned on Warren at this startling accusation. They saw a man with a face flushed crimson, who started violently to his feet, calling out in a frantic tone:

"It is false! There is a plot to ruin me! I deny it all!"

"Silence!" thundered the judge. "Officers, remove that person from the room if he again interrupts the proceedings, but see that he does not leave the building; he may be needed!"

There was something so stern and threatening in these words that Warren sunk back into his seat with an appearance of utter dismay. The plot he had so diligently concocted seemed about to fall back on him with crushing weight.

By this time the audience was wrought to the intensest pitch of excitement, which seemed shared in by the judge. The course taken by the defense had completely overturned the whole work of the preceding day.

The next question added to the surprise.

"Was any other person connected with this affair besides William Warren?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Very well; I will ask you later the name of this person. Now, I wish to know the character of your last operations with this bank book?"

Clark had evidently made up his mind to tell the whole truth. In fact, he had been seen and manipulated by Cop Colt the night before.

A few more questions brought out the fact that he had, on the day of his visit to Mrs. Hamilton, received the book from William Warren, with directions to conceal it in Dorsey Hamilton's room. He had done so after taking leave of Mrs. Hamilton. He had quickly entered the room, slipped the book into the secret drawer of the desk, and hastily left the house.

"That will do for the present," said the attorney, in his clear, cold voice.

Clark stepped down amid a silence that quickly became a busy buzz of whispering. A hundred eyes were turned on Warren, who was a picture of utter fright and consternation.

The prisoner presented a very different aspect. He was cool and composed, with a proud look of conscious rectitude that none could help from contrasting with the pitiable dismay of the shrinking villain who was becoming so clearly exposed. Just then prisoner and accuser seemed to have changed places.

The attorney next offered in evidence a minute slip of paper. He read its contents to the jury:

"Spring the trap. O."

The audience looked at one another in surprise. What could this mean? Was it a riddle for the court to guess?

But in one part of the room there was a sudden stir of confusion.

"Order!" cried the tipstaff.

"What is the matter there?" demanded the judge.

"A man has fainted."

It proved to be William Warren. The strange appearance of this dangerous paper, which he fully believed lost or destroyed, had finished the work of the preceding testimony. He had fallen in a dead swoon.

"Remove him from the court," ordered

the judge sternly. "But see that he does not leave the building. It begins to look as if we had the wrong man in the prisoner's dock."

"What do you intend to prove by that paper?" demanded the prosecuting attorney. "I object to the offering of irrelevant evidence."

A short debate ensued between the lawyers, which was quickly ended by the judge dismissing the objection.

"Joseph Flite," called the attorney for the defense.

Mr. Flite, who had been listening with a strangely perturbed face to the unexpected evidence, started at this demand.

"Me, sir? Do you wish me?"

"Yes. Please step forward."

The new witness came forward with an air of great surprise.

"Will you examine this paper, and tell me if you recognize this handwriting?"

He took the slip and closely examined it, with a surprised and disconcerted air.

"What can it mean?" he asked. "This gentleman surely has nothing to do with the case."

"You recognize it, then?"

"Yes. There can be no doubt of it. It is written by my business partner, Mr. Westly Osborn. What—"

"That will do, sir," came the cold response. "You may step down."

Amid a deathly hush of interest, Coply Colt was next called to the stand. He was asked, in his turn, if he recognized that paper, and if he would describe where he had seen it before.

His description of how it had floated out of the bank book, on turning over the leaves, was of thrilling interest. It seemed to open new vistas of suspicion in the case which the audience had not yet perceived. At once every hearer was asking himself by what strange chance it had come into the book, and what was its actual meaning.

Harry Fay was next put upon the stand, and testified to the same thing, the falling of the slip from the bank book.

Finally John Clark was recalled.

"You have admitted that another party than William Warren was concerned in your operations in this affair. In what way was this person concerned?"

"It was he that first engaged me to make the bank deposits. I had to obey him. I did not know what it meant, but I dared not refuse him. I was completely in his power."

"What is the name of this person?"

"Westly Osborn."

The intense quiet that had reigned broke into a sudden stir and confusion. The person thus accused was well known to many persons there present. Mr. Flite sprung up with a hasty exclamation, but immediately sunk down again, with a look of deep confusion in his usually staid face. He looked like one whose eyes had been suddenly opened.

With the evidence of this witness the case rested. The prosecuting attorney ventured a few words of cross-examination, but he was too demoralized to make much of an effort. His case was lost beyond hope.

The prisoner's counsel made a short but telling address, in which he briefly outlined Cop's theory of the plot, after which the judge submitted the case to the jury, with a ruling that was very strongly in the prisoner's favor.

At this moment a person who had just entered the room pushed his way through the throng until he reached the location of Cop Colt.

It was the young scout, Bilkins.

He whispered excitedly with the detective, who seemed equally disturbed with the communication.

"This afternoon? At five? Are you sure?"

"Yes. Everything is ready."

"By Heaven, then it must be stopped! There shall be some uninited wedding-guests!"

He made his way with difficulty to the judge's bench, and talked with him earnestly for several minutes. The judge, with a show of equal interest, at once drew some paper toward him, and wrote hastily.

"Will you be in time, Mr. Colt?"

"Oh yes. I have abundant time."

"This case is settled. The jury will decide without leaving their seats."

Cop, followed by Bilkins, pushed his way through the crowd to the door of the courtroom. Before reaching it, however, there was a stir behind him. The jury had risen.

"Gentlemen of the jury, are you prepared with a verdict?" came in the loud tones of the clerk of the court.

"We are," answered the foreman.

"Do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty."

A noise that was almost a shout succeeded. Cop turned hastily back, and made his way through the court toward the prisoner's dock.

CHAPTER XXVI.

UNBIDDEN WEDDING-GUESTS.

THE marriage between Westly Osborn and Clare Amberly had been arranged to take place privately in the chapel of a neighboring Episcopal church. Both parties had reasons for avoiding display, and only a few personal friends were invited.

Osborn had not attended that day's trial. He had too much else on hand, and was utterly unaware of the strange disclosures about to be made. He entered the church with his promised bride with a look of confident assurance, that showed complete ignorance of the way his name had been brought into the Hamilton trial.

Quite a number of persons were collected in the chapel when the bridal-party entered. More, indeed, were there than had been invited. It seemed as if some strangers had intruded. Among these was a group of a half-dozen persons who occupied the cavity of an embrasured window, as if inclined to withdraw from observation.

The bridal-party advanced slowly up the aisle. The face of the bride was downcast, her eyes fixed on the floor, her cheeks pale, her lips tremulous. There seemed doubt in her mind and hesitation in her step.

Not so the groom. He walked erect and confident, a look of pride and satisfaction on his face. He glanced to right and left as he advanced, and acknowledged his personal friends with a show of recognition.

Mr. Markham, his senior partner, stood near the head of the aisle. He was a fine-looking man, erect and soldierly, with white hair and benevolent face.

To him Osborn spoke a few words in a low voice, and an accent of annoyance.

"Where is Flite? He might have left business long enough for this occasion."

"He has not been at the office to-day. He was at the trial. I don't know what detained him."

As he spoke the door of the chapel opened rather hastily, and as if pushed by an impetuous hand. Most of the persons present looked round in surprise at the indecorous noise.

It was Mr. Flite who had so rudely entered. But there was a marked change from his usually cool, stern, self-reliant aspect. He was now evidently disturbed and indignant, while a deep frown contracted his dark brows.

He strode up to the head of the church, with a step so heedlessly loud as to be positively insulting to the bridal-party. Even Clare lifted her downcast eyes, while a flush came to her pale cheek. The face of the rector, who stood waiting in his ministerial robes, was full of indignation. Osborn turned, with flashing eyes, and looked the new-come guest sternly in the face.

"I am late," said Flite, in a voice of strange significance; "I stayed for the end of the trial."

Injudicious as this remark was under the circumstances, there was something in his tone that alarmed the groom and forced him to inquire:

"With what result?"

"Dorsey Hamilton was acquitted!"

A quick stir of surprise and interest went through the whole assembly. Mr. Markham took a hasty step forward; Clare's face flushed, while a faint exclamation came from her lips; Osborn grew pale and disturbed. The procession stopped. Those few words had acted like a bar to the steps of the solemnly moving party.

Osborn looked into the frowning eyes and compressed lips of the speaker.

"Acquitted! How?—on what plea?"

"That of conspiracy," came in stern accents, that rung through the vaulted roof of the chapel. "William Warren is arrested as the chief agent in the conspiracy, but another is named as the prime mover in the plot!"

"Who?"

Osborn's face was now of the pallor of death; Clare had quitted her hold of his arm, and stood looking from one to the other with distended eyes.

"Yourself—Westly Osborn! You are the villain that has hounded an innocent man to his doom!" Flite's voice rung, like the thunder-clap of doom.

"It is false! It is—"

Osborn paused, and clutched for a moment at the air; a mist floated before his eyes; he reeled and fell prostrate to the floor. His senses had fled in the violent spasm of terror and dismay, and the wild rush of blood to his distracted brain.

An indescribable confusion pervaded the whole room. Some moved angrily forward, indignant at an interruption which they did not understand; others stood the pictures of consternation. The party which had occupied the window embrasure hastily advanced. The bride trembled and grew deathly pale; she moved a few steps from the fallen man, her eyes fixed on the face of his accuser with a look of awe-stricken interest.

She swayed like a wind-blown willow, and seemed on the point of sinking to the floor. But at this instant one of the group of strangers quickly advanced, seized her extended hand, and sustained her by an arm round her waist.

He whispered a word in her ear.

Whatever it was, it seemed to pass through her like an electric shock. Her yielding form straightened. She started as if with an impulse to break from that firm clasp. Then she yielded, and fixed her eyes on his with a look of infinite yearning.

"Dorsey Hamilton? You?"

"I, Clare! No longer an accused felon, but free and innocent in the sight of God and man! There lies the felon, to whose base device we had both so nearly been sacrificed."

The richly dressed bridesmaids clustered around the bride and the stranger who sustained her like a flock of scared birds. Their eyes read the two faces with intense interest. Here was a romance of which they had not dreamed.

As if roused by the voice of his intended victim, Osborn recovered from his momentary insensibility, and slowly rose from the floor, looking with eyes of wandering doubt around the circle of faces that were fixed on him with stern inquiry.

"Where am I? What has happened? Ah! Joseph Flite! It is you that come here with that false lie! You have always been my secret enemy. I will be even with you yet! My time will come!"

He moved with an irresolute step toward the door.

"It has come," spoke a stern voice. "I have tracked you, my shrewd fox, through many a winding turn. Cunning as you were you have left traces of your track, and I have taken up every trace. You are at the end of your rope at last and are my prisoner."

A heavy hand fell upon his shoulder. The cool gray eyes of Cop Colt were fixed upon his pale and troubled face. For the moment his courage left him, and he shrunk from his captor in trembling dread.

"I deny it all!" he suddenly cried, in a shrill tone. "Who are you, sir? What warrant have you to touch me? Take your hand from my shoulder!"

"I have this warrant." And Cop showed the paper given him by Judge Norwood. "Come, my friend, you may as well give up the ship. I, Cop Colt, detective, have had this case in hand, and there is not a step in your whole plot that I have not unraveled. If you had spent to-day in the court, as you did yesterday, you would not need an explanation of this arrest. Is not this so, Mr. Flite?"

"It is," came in Flite's harsh accents.

"Is there not something wrong here?" demanded Mr. Markham. "I do not understand it."

"No," answered Mr. Flite. "Hamilton

is fully acquitted of the charge against him. There remains only the felony of which he was formerly convicted, and of which he has paid the penalty."

The dejected prisoner hastily lifted his head at these words, while a look of hate and malignity flashed from his eyes.

"Yes," he cried harshly, "let him clear himself of that, if he can! He would have stolen from me the woman I loved! She is in his arms now! Let her marry the jail-bird, if she will!" His eyes flashed with the fire of insanity, as he fixed them wildly on the forms of Clare and her lover.

"I fancy he can accomplish that, too," said Cop dryly. "This conspiracy did not begin a month ago, but more than five years ago. You have wrought well to win this woman, Westly Osborn, for you had your rival convicted of crime and thrown into jail. Only Heaven worked in his favor, and saved this innocent woman from your base wiles."

"Great Heaven, can that be true?"

It was Clare Amberly's voice that rung in shrill appeal through the church, its tones thrilling to every heart. She rushed wildly forward as she spoke, tearing the bridal favors from her dress, and flinging them to the floor.

"Conspiracy! Plot! Fraud! Oh, tell me, can it be true? Has he been falsely accused, and suffered an imprisonment without a crime?"

"Yes, and through the schemes of this man, with jealousy as the sole motive of his criminal deeds."

She turned her eyes from the earnest face of the detective, and fixed them on the pallid and dismayed countenance of the man to whom she had been so nearly sacrificed. There was a wild appeal for the truth in her look, but he turned away. He could not bear to meet her gaze just then.

Her eyes wandered from face to face of the expectant and excited wedding-guests, as if seeking for their verdict from their looks. Finally they rested on the upright form and earnest, hopeful face of Dorsey Hamilton, in whose eyes were traces of mingled pity and indignation.

One glance only, and the terribly excited woman flew hastily toward him, and caught his hands in hers, while her eager eyes seemed to devour his face.

"Only you, Dorsey. I loved you through it all. I was marrying that man through despair, not love."

He caught her again in a close embrace.

"I have suffered, but I am repaid," he whispered. "Twenty years of prison life would be nothing, with such a prize at the end."

CHAPTER XXVII.

FINALE.

IT is not necessary to dilate at length on the concluding incidents of the story of crime which we have so long pursued. Deeply as the villain had hidden his crime it was fully revealed at last, the innocent cleared, and the guilty punished.

Westly Osborn and William Warren were put on trial on the charge of criminal conspiracy to ruin an innocent man, and under a very heavy claim for damages for the imprisonment he had received.

The case was the most interesting one that had been tried before the Philadelphia courts for years. All the long chain of evidence which the experienced detective had so diligently collected was brought forward. He himself was a main witness, and told the story of his investigation, how he had at first looked upon Joseph Flite as the actual criminal, but how the truth had been gradually revealed. Only for the second crime the first might ever have remained an undivulged mystery, and Dorsey Hamilton continued under ban to the end of his life.

In corroboration of this story the various witnesses we have seen were brought forward. Of these Alice Johnson and John Clark were the most important. We need not repeat their evidence. The reader knows it already. But it was enough in itself to convict the two prisoners of the crime charged against them.

Mr. Markham was put on the stand to detail the incidents connected with his giving the safe-key to Dorsey Hamilton, and Bridget Flanagan was an important witness in corroboration of the evidence of Alice Johnson.

She told the story of what she had seen on the night of the robbery, in regard to the suspicious movements of that young lady.

The business connections between Osborn and Warren were next skillfully made clear. It was shown that Warren had been intrusted with large sums for speculative purposes, and that he had made private use of twenty thousand dollars of this money. This had been discovered by Osborn, who had held it over him as a continual threat, and had used it to force Warren to aid him in his scheme against Dorsey Hamilton, as he had used his knowledge of the diamond theft to control John Clark.

The secret business relations of Benton & Co., were in like manner made public. Osborn proved to be a private partner and the financial backer of the house, and it was shown that it was he who had directed Mr. Merry to receive the deposit from Dorsey Hamilton, and who had forged the signature of Hamilton in the book.

Point by point the whole involved plot was revealed, and the guilt of the accused rendered so clear, that not a thread of hope remained of their acquittal.

Only a single link of the evidence was suffered to rest in obscurity, the present made to Judge Norwood. But the scheme of Osborn to prevent the discharge of the prisoner was laid bare, and its object shown to be an effort to prevent any possible danger of rivalry in his suit of Clare Amberly, who had then almost consented to be his wife.

The trial ended in a conviction on every point of the indictment, and the sentence of the prisoners, Osborn to ten years' solitary confinement, and Warren, as a secondary agent in the crime, to six years. In addition to this the claim for damages was adjusted at one hundred and fifty thousand dollars against Westly Osborn and fifty thousand against William Warren, in accordance with their separate ability to pay.

The matter ended in a complete rehabilitation of Dorsey Hamilton from the conviction formerly obtained against him, and the erasure of the whole record from the dockets of the court.

It was already erased from the public mind, and the late convict now became the most popular person in the City of Brotherly Love.

Cop Colt's well-established reputation was greatly enhanced by his skillful handling of this difficult case, though the detective appeared to care little for that. It was the chase he enjoyed, not the brush at the end.

"I have tried to offer my deepest thanks to all who have helped me in this case," said Dorsey to the detective. "With your aid, I have quashed all criminal proceedings against John Clark and Alice Johnson. Clark, I fancy, has reformed, and Alice has learned to despise her false lover of old. I should not wonder if there would yet be a match between the two. If so, that useful diamond ring shall be at their service as a wedding-ring. That would be a good ending to its many good services. But there is yet one of my best friends to whom I owe more than thanks. What has become of the good old fellow, Jake Jumper? He has done so much for me that I cannot consent to see him wander about any longer as a homeless tramp."

Colt smiled oddly at this request.

"I think you do owe something to old Jake," he said. "By good luck, I know where to lay my hands on him within five minutes. Wait, and I will give you an opportunity to tell him what you think of him."

Cop left the office, while Dorsey sat expectantly waiting. It was more than the time named ere the door again opened. Dorsey looked up, expecting to see the tramp ushered in by the detective. But Jake stood there alone—the same seedy, queer-looking, genial-faced old reprobate that he so well remembered.

"Hey, lad! Cop Colt said as how you wanted ter see the old man! Guv us yer flipper, boy! It does my eyes pretty to see yer face ag'in!"

Dorsey shook hands warmly with the old fellow.

"I'll not soon forget what I owe you, Jake," he said. "Only that you started me on the right track, I might never have escaped from my difficulties. I must not for-

get to give you an ample reward for your service."

"Oh, guv it to Cop. Him and me's pals, you know; and the old chap don't want much funds to git along."

"But you must get along more decently. I hate to see you wandering around as a shabby vagrant. I must find you a home, where you can live in comfort for the rest of your life."

"Jist guv it to Cop Colt. Ain't no use wastin' cash on me."

"Don't be afraid but that Cop will get his share. By the way, where is he? He went after you, and did not return."

"Oh, he ain't fur away."

"But where?"

"Here!"

This word was spoken in a very different tone of voice. The old fellow raised his hands to his head and face and went through some quick manipulations. The shabby hat went off, and with it a rusty wig. The heavy and disheveled beard disappeared from his face. The wrinkles seemed to smooth out under his hand. To Dorsey's utter surprise, he saw before him the beardless face, smooth skin and close-cut hair of Cop Colt, who was laughing heartily at his look of amazement.

"Guess ye kin guy it to Cop," he said. "Old Jake's pegged out."

Dorsey had not a word to say. He was utterly dumfounded at this final instance of Cop's ability at disguise.

It is hardly necessary to say that he did give it to Cop Colt and that very liberally, for his invaluable service.

In fact, Dorsey's present fortune did not consist only of the damages awarded him by the court. Both Mr. Markham and Mr. Flite felt that they owed him a recompense for the suffering he had endured, and he was made a full partner in the house of Markham & Co. in place of Westly Osborn, withdrawn.

There is but one more matter with which we are concerned. That the love between Dorsey Hamilton and Clare Amberly burned with double warmth for the chill it had passed through need not be told. It ended, as all true love should end, in a happy wedding which met with none of the disastrous incidents of the wedding scene we have just chronicled.

They are now among the happiest married couples in the city in which they reside. The pain has passed, the joy remains, love has conquered, jealousy has been defeated, and constancy and crime alike have had their reward.

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